

A close-up portrait of Lil Wayne, looking down with his eyes closed. He is wearing a black fedora and has several tattoos on his face and neck. The tattoos include "I AM MUSIC" on his left cheek, "Fear" on his right cheek, a cross on his forehead, and "God" on his right eye. He is also wearing a silver chain with a large diamond pendant. The background is a plain, light color.

Rolling Stone

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**THE BUSH
CRIMES**
INSIDE THE
INTERIOR DEPT.

Lil Wayne Goes Rock

Rap's
Genius
Changes
His Game

The Last Outlaw

Kris Kristofferson's
American Journey
BY ETHAN HAWKE

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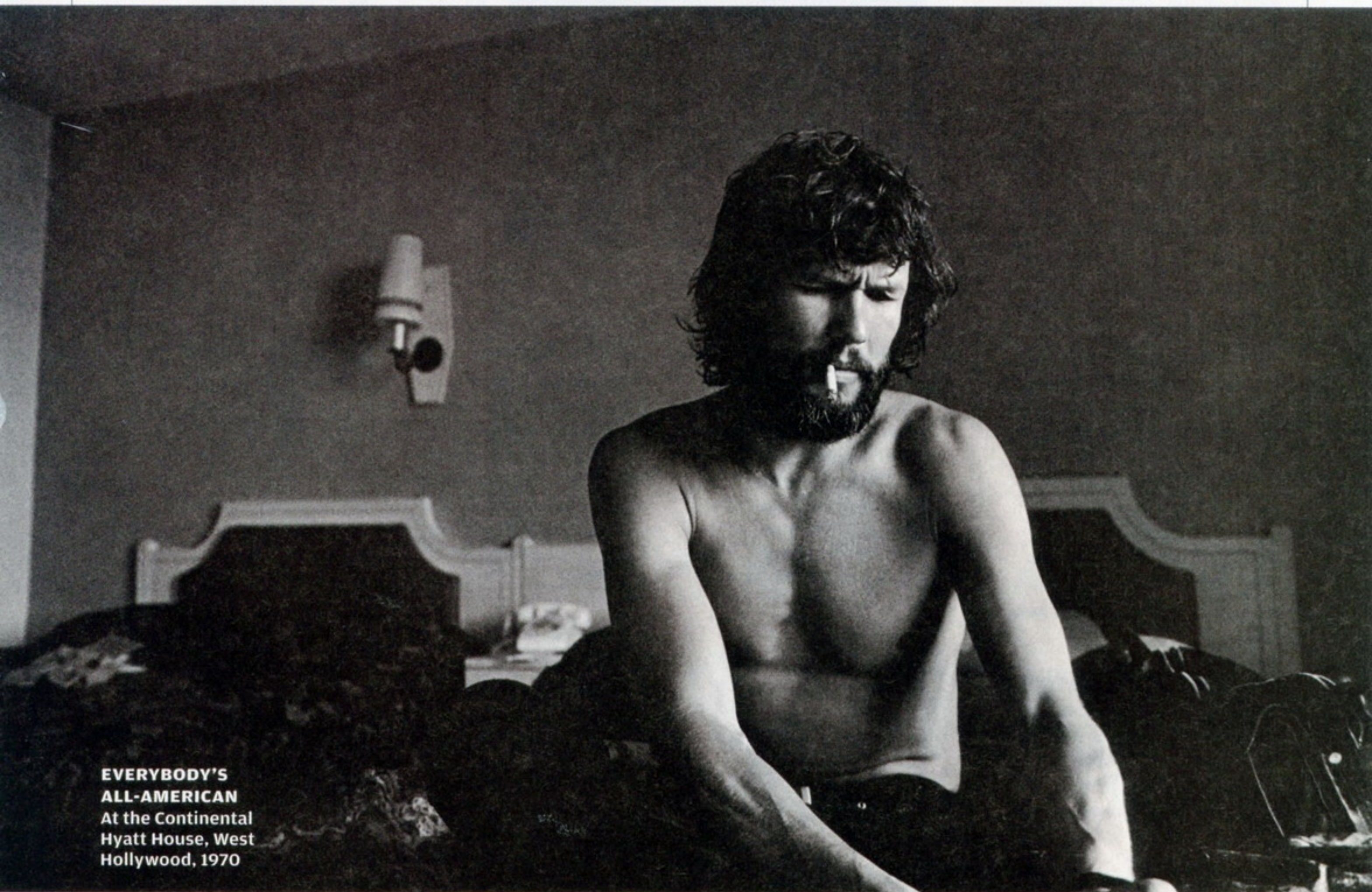


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EVERYBODY'S
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At the Continental
Hyatt House, West
Hollywood, 1970

The Last Outlaw Poet

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON'S EPIC JOURNEY has taken him from Oxford to the Army Rangers to Nashville and Hollywood. He gained fame by rewriting the rules for country music with songs like "Sunday Morning Coming Down"

and "Me and Bobby McGee," and accidentally became one of the biggest movie stars in the world. Despite many ups and downs, he's never stopped fighting for what he believes in. The true tale of an American icon. *By Ethan Hawke, PAGE 50*

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Lil Wayne, Rap's Alien Genius

A visit to the isolated, luxurious and perpetually stoned world of "the greatest rapper alive" as he embarks on his next quest: to be a rock star.

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Lil Wayne photographed in Atlanta, March 15th, 2009.

Photograph by Peter Yang

Styling by Marisa Flores for Margaret Maldonado Agency. Grooming by Nikki Nelms. Hat from Hollywood Hatters.

rollingstone.com



Lil Wayne

Rolling With Lil Wayne

Contributing editor Mark Binelli talks about hanging out with rap's reigning king in his museum-style Atlanta pad.

PLUS: Outtakes from Wayne's cover shoot and a breakdown of the 10 best under-the-radar Weezy tracks, from the Santi-gold-sampling "Unstoppable" to the 50 Cent-baiting "Lousianimal." *rollingstone.com/issue1076*

LIVE REPORT

Bruce Springsteen Kicks Off '09 Tour

The E Street Band hit the road behind *Working on a Dream* on April 1st. An inside look at rehearsals, plus backstage interviews with the group and new drummer Jay Weinberg. *rollingstone.com/rockdaily*

VIDEO INTERVIEW

Inside Mastodon's 'Crack the Skye'

Mastodon's Troy Sanders and Brann Dailor visit ROLLING STONE to talk about their most ambitious album yet – and how they were influenced by *River's Edge*. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*

PHOTOS



Asher Roth

Snapshots of the "I Love College" rapper's sloppy spring break: drinking, sunbathing, making out with (multiple) girls. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*



Metallica
in 1985

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

2009 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Ceremony

Video and on-the-scene reports as Metallica, Jeff Beck, Run-DMC and others enter the Hall of Fame.

PLUS: Classic RS features, must-have tunes and photo galleries of this year's inductees. *rollingstone.com/rockhall*

Ethan Hawke's Kris Kristofferson Playlist

The actor-director-writer gives the lowdown on 20 essential Kristofferson tracks and tells why "When I Loved Her" is a favorite. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Dave Matthews Band

DMB's seventh studio disc comes out in June; read up on the band's early days in our 1996 feature, which finds Matthews hanging at his hometown Charlottesville, Virginia, bar. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*

The Allman Brothers

The band recently wrapped a 15-date run at New York's Beacon Theatre in honor of late guitarist Duane Allman. Check out Cameron Crowe's 1973 story – written two years after Allman's death, as the group got its first taste of stardom. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*

BLOGS

Black Keys Get Busy

Watch guitarist Dan Auerbach play new solo tunes; hear a track from drummer Patrick Carney's side project, Drummer. *rollingstone.com/smokingsection*

Album Preview: The Hold Steady

The rockers talk about the booze and bromance on their live CD-DVD. *rollingstone.com/rockdaily*

Travers: Best and Worst Car Movies

From *Ronin* to *Speed Racer*, five flicks to see – and five to skip. *rollingstone.com/traverstake*

ON ASSIGNMENT

Paul and Ringo Get Back – Together

The duo hit the stage for a benefit gig in New York; a full report and pics. *rollingstone.com/issue1076*



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and Starr



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Editor's Notes

An All-Star Debut

A FEW MONTHS AGO, A RELATIVELY unknown magazine journalist named Ethan Hawke stopped by our office to pitch a story. He wanted to profile Kris Kristofferson, a man who has led one of the most extraordinary lives of our time, a former Rhodes scholar and Army helicopter pilot who had gone on to become an era-defining songwriter and then a big-time Seventies leading man, while still making time for a few trips into various gutters along the way. It's been a couple of decades since Kristofferson was a household name, but as he's leathered into grand-old-man authenticity, Hawke explains, he's recorded a series of incredible albums – and still managed to steal a movie or two every few years.

It's not every day we turn 14 pages of our magazine over to a writer with no journalism experience, but we had a hunch about Hawke. Foremost was the passion, imagination and enthusiasm he brought to his subject. But also, we knew him as the author of two fine novels: *The Hottest State* and *Ash Wednesday* (which we excerpted in *ROLLING STONE* in 2002). And, of course, there was his acclaimed, Oscar-nominated performance in *Training Day* and the fact that he was on the cover of *ROLLING STONE* in 1995. So it didn't seem like too much of a risk.



TWO TEXANS Hawke with Kristofferson, whom he calls the Seventies' "poet laureate."

"My interest in Kris is that he's a completely unique figure in the history of American art," Hawke says. "He achieved an incredible level of success in movies and rock & roll when they were both at their finest point. There was a moment when America was changing, and he was the face of it. But he wasn't just the face. He was also the poet laureate."

In a related profile note, we're thrilled to announce that we've been nominated for a National Magazine Award in Profile Writing for "The Lost Years and Last Days of David Foster Wallace," by David Lipsky [RS 1064].

—WILL DANA, *Managing Editor*

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

David LaChapelle

After a career photographing for magazines, David LaChapelle has recently decided to focus on producing museum exhibitions of his work. (He currently has two shows, in Mexico City and Paris.) But he was more than willing to shoot Kris Kristofferson for RS (page 50). Not only is LaChapelle a huge fan, he also happens to live down the road from the icon in Maui, Hawaii. "There's a great energy to his music," he says. "I just love his songs."



Brian Hiatt

Since coming to RS in 2004, associate editor Brian Hiatt has witnessed plenty of rock-star madness out on the road, from Hinder setting their balls on fire to John Mayer's stoned ruminations on *Playgirl*. But things got especially intense when he hung out with metal masters Mastodon for this issue's profile: The band's insanely drunk frontman, Brent Hinds, threatened to kill him. (Read for yourself on page 28.) "He might need some media training," says Hiatt.

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Correspondence

{ Love Letters & Advice }



The Future of U2

ONCE AGAIN, U2 HAVE pulled the walls down, found a new direction and delivered. Thanks for the story "U2 Hymns for the Future" [RS 1074]. Their album *No Line on the Horizon* flat-out rocks. All I can say is thank God for U2.

Chris Eckroad, Canton, OH

U2 ARE THE ONLY BAND in the world that could have made this album, and they are the only band with big enough balls to unabashedly wear their religion on their sleeves and scream out loud about it.

Jason M. Hoag, Cohoes, NY

WITH LARRY MULLEN JR. and Adam Clayton out of focus on the cover, RS dismisses them. A shame, since the rhythm-section work on the new record is the best they've put together in years. Remember: Bono and the Edge are only half of the group.

Brett Taylor, Milwaukee

MAD PROPS TO BRIAN HIATT for his U2 story. Now when I listen to *No Line on the Horizon*, I know the story behind the songs on the album. It's refreshing when a journalist drops all pretense of basking in celebrity and goes for analytical substance instead. This kind of meat-and-potatoes rock reporting is why I subscribe.

Keith Stover, Bucksport, ME

IS BONO PROMOTING AN album or getting ready for a part in *Pirates of the Caribbean*?

Jonathan Goeschl
Lancaster, CA

PLEASE TELL BONO, FOR THE sake of all of us, to keep his sunglasses on.

John Grove, Elkhart, IN

THANKS FOR THE GREAT article on U2. It's wonderful that you focused so much on their faith, especially for a godless magazine such as yours.

David Riesenbeck
Terre Haute, IN

I'VE BEEN A FAN SINCE THE beginning and agree that this is some of the best music U2 has recorded. They've always taken my spirit to a better place.

Darren Reichenberger
Oshkosh, WI

I HAVE BEEN PURCHASING U2 records since 1983. So, thank you, Edge, for paying attention to which of the 40-odd-thousand permutations there were for assembling the songs on the new album; in the age of iTunes, album sequencing has become a lost art.

Robert J. Binney, Philadelphia

Narco War

EXCELLENT ARTICLE BY Guy Lawson ["The Making of a Narco State," RS 1074]. Thank you, RS, for being one of the lone voices of reason in this immoral war. I have a message for the U.S. government: It is *my* personal responsibility to regulate what goes into my body. And to Mexico: Please go ahead with legalization. You'll make so much money off taxation and tourism that you will finally be able to tell the gringo to go home!

Jorge Paez, Austin

JUST AS ALCOHOL PROHIBITION gave rise to Al Capone, drug prohibition has created

the violent drug-trafficking organizations behind all the killings in Mexico. Drug prohibition finances organized crime at home and terrorism abroad, which is then used to justify increased drug-war spending. Whether we like it or not, drugs are here to stay. Changing human nature is not an option. Reforming harmful drug laws, however, is an option, one that the Obama administration should pursue.

Robert Sharpe, Policy Analyst
Common Sense for Drug Policy
Washington, DC

HONESTLY, WHY IS RS' ONLY solution to the Drug War legalization? The only real way to win is if Americans quit using, but I'm afraid that would take an act of God.

Wes Sedlmayr, Sierra Vista, AZ

ANY ARTICLE ON THE NARCO war that quotes Gen. Barry McCaffrey, the former head of the morally bankrupt U.S.

"Thanks for the great article on U2. It's wonderful that a godless magazine like yours focused on their faith."

drug policy, and has not a single mention of the U.S. government's inability to end the flow of U.S. arms to the cartels is all heat and no light.

Barry Simon, San Francisco

Schlubby Segel

I LOVED THE FEATURE ON Jason Segel ["The Anxiety-Ridden Joy Ride of Jason Segel," RS 1074]. I could relate on so many levels – this story made my day.

Steven Holsey, Detroit

ONLY ERIK HEDEGAARD would ask Segel when was the last time he masturbated. Now *that's* good journalism – not only classy, but definitely rele-

vant to Segel's film experience and to the piece.

Dave Steinfeld, New York

Piano Man

I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT Billy Joel [Q&A, RS 1074] feels like a slut when he is paid really well for doing a "stupid private gig." Walking offstage after playing music is "the walk of shame"? Please, spare us. I lost my job and would be joyful to have someone pay me really well for doing my job.

C.B. Sweet, San Diego

Neko's Wild Side

THANK YOU, RS AND CHRISTIAN Hoard, for your terrific story ["Neko Case's Animal Instincts," RS 1074]. Case is exactly the rock & roll maven that I pegged her to be. Her new record, *Middle Cyclone*, effortlessly goes from dark and brooding to beautiful and amusing, and somehow manages to be socially conscious at the same time. She has created a challenge for a generation of listeners.

Krystae Borhaug
Sanford, FL

Music Stores, RIP

REGARDING YOUR PIECE ON the death of music megastores

[RS 1074], may I remind you that the rise of these business-es threatened local and indie record stores? Perhaps the future of CD sales will belong to smaller neighborhood shops that don't overreach. Long live the mom-and-pops.

Luke Ericson, San Francisco

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SXSW BREAKOUTS

Our picks: From Little Boots' electro-pop to Deer Tick's hillbilly rock. **Page 20**

DMB IN THE STUDIO

"People who don't like us will like this record," says Dave Matthews. **Page 22**

Q&A: KAREN O

Yeah Yeah Yeahs singer on crying at the club and cutting back on booze. **Page 32**

Rock & Roll

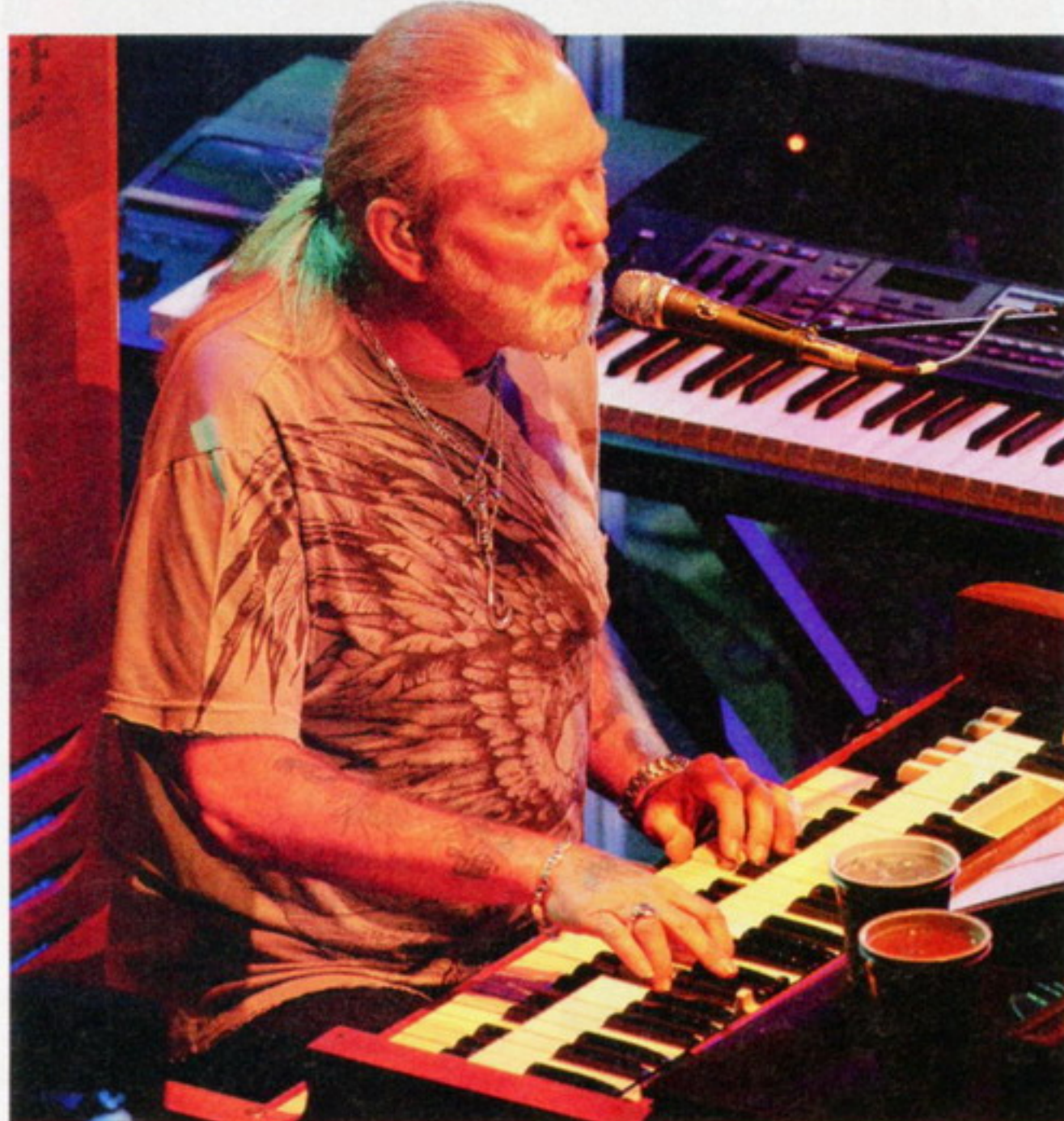
Allman Brothers and Friends Take New York

Clapton, Sheryl Crow, Phish help band celebrate 40 years
By David Browne

BACKSTAGE BEFORE THE eighth night of the Allman Brothers Band's recent 15-night run of shows at New York's Beacon Theatre, 61-year-old drummer Butch Trucks can barely contain his excitement about tonight's secret guest. "We've been trying to do this for 40 years!" he says, referring to the first time the Allmans will share a stage with Eric Clapton. "He's been borrowing our guitar players since the *Layla* record," says Gregg Allman with a chuckle. "So he kinda owed us."

For two nights, Clapton joined the band to tear through tunes including "Anyday," "Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad?" "Little Wing" and, of course, "Layla." His unannounced (but widely rumored) appearance helped the Allmans celebrate their 40th anniversary – and honor co-founder and guitarist Duane Allman, who died in a motorcycle crash in 1971. "To be honest, one of the reasons we're doing this is that Duane doesn't loom big enough," says Trucks. "Too many people don't even know who he is."

During the 15 nights, an astonishing list of old friends joined the Allmans. "We tried to get everybody that my brother had played with," says Gregg. Boz Scaggs played his 1969 classic "Loan Me a Dime," which originally featured one of Duane's [Cont. on 16]



IN MEMORY OF DUANE "We tried to get everybody that my brother had played with," says Gregg Allman (top, at New York's Beacon Theatre). Clapton (above, with Derek Trucks) sat in for two nights.

Where Do All the Best Tix Go?

How artists profit by scalping the top seats to their own shows
By Steve Knopper

FANS HAVE LONG WONDERED why it's nearly impossible to get good seats to big shows – and now they're beginning to get some answers, as Ticketmaster's attempt to merge with Live Nation has brought congressional scrutiny to ticketing

INDUSTRY

and scalping issues in recent months. Top concert-industry sources confirm to *ROLLING STONE* that the practice of skimming the best seats off the top of the pool and selling them at huge markups happens at nearly all concerts.

Even some artists are going public with their concerns. "The venue, the promoter, the ticketing agency and often the artist camp (artist, management and agent) take tickets from the pool of available seats and feed them directly to the reseller," *NIN* frontman Trent Reznor wrote on his blog recently. "This is a very common practice that happens more often than not."

In recent testimony to Congress, Ticketmaster CEO Irving [Cont. on 18]

ALLMAN BROTHERS

[Cont. from 15] greatest solos; Levon Helm sang "The Weight" and "Ophelia," and Taj Mahal brought the house down with a lead vocal on "Statesboro Blues." After initially rejecting the idea of inviting guitarist Dickey Betts, who was fired from the band in 2000, the Allmans sent him an invitation; at press time, Betts' participation was still undetermined. "If he does come, it's not gonna be easy," says Trucks. "There's a lot of bad blood. But for the sake of Duane, we decided we would ask."

Most nights began with a photo montage of Duane and a rendition of "Little Martha," from the classic 1972 disc *Eat a Peach*, centered around current guitarists Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks. The Allmans also made sure to invite younger musicians who are breathing



OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS Sheryl Crow (with Warren Haynes, left, and Derek Trucks) and Buddy Guy (below, with Haynes) were among the guests at the New York shows.



life into jam-band traditions, including Phish's Trey Anastasio and Page McConnell, who elevated "Southbound" and "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed." "I've been playing Allman Brothers songs more years than I care to count," says McConnell. "After being in a band a number of years, you respect more and more the longevity and stamina it takes to do what they do year after year."

Sheryl Crow sang a verse of "Midnight Rider" ("One of the quintessential great pieces of songwriting," she says) and took the lead on versions of Blind Faith's "Can't Find My Way Home" and Bob Dylan's "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry." When she wasn't onstage, Crow spent most of the show in the audience. "I walked in, and there were clouds of

weed floating around the room, and everyone was standing on their feet from the second they started playing," she says. "I felt like I was 16."

Working up all that material – about 100 songs over the course of the run – became as much a part of the nightly ritual as the shows themselves. The band set up a separate practice space at the Beacon for last-minute rehearsals. At Clapton's rehearsal – which finished two hours before the doors opened – the guitarist told everyone the story of how Derek and the Dominos drummer Jim Gordon came up with the song's timeless piano coda. "I'd heard about some of that before, but it was great hearing it from him," says Haynes.

The Beacon shows mark the beginning of a year of exten-

sive touring for the Allmans – but also a finale of sorts. Starting in 2010, the band will cut back its road schedule, possibly playing only a dozen summer shows. "We're winding down," says Butch Trucks. "The end is coming. We know that. I had to have a knee replacement two years ago. I can't straighten my right arm because of arthritis. No matter how much fun I've been having, it's taking its toll." Although Allman has recovered from a bout with hepatitis C last year, he admits he still deals with "layers of tired."

For the moment, though, the Allmans are reveling in the warm musical afterglow of the Beacon shows. "I just figured this year would be probably the capper to all of 'em," says Allman. "But I didn't know it would be to this extent." After one of the two Clapton nights, Allman bumped into the guitarist, whose dressing room was next to his. "He had the most warm smile on his face," Allman says. "And he said, 'Thank you so much for letting me come and be a part of this.' I said, 'Man, anytime.'"

HOT LIST



BOB DYLAN

"Beyond Here Lies Nothin' "

Ever dreamed of riding out the end times in a South Texas roadhouse with a killer band? Us too! And that's the vibe of Dylan's new single – with its Tex-Mex accordion, blues guitar and doomy lyrics, it goes down like chipotle-spiced apocalypse.

WHITE LIES

"Death"

This Wembley-size mope rocker is the best Killers song of the year – even though this British buzz band's pompous, pasty frontman sings like he swallowed a Joy Division box set.

CONOR OBERST

"Slowly (Oh So Slowly)"

Our bro Conor's new jam with the Mystic Valley Band hits on a recipe for roots-rock orgasm: two parts John Mellencamp, one dash Uncle Tupelo. Mmm, earthy!

RYE RYE

FEAT. M.I.A.

"Bang"

This gloriously showoffy track from M.I.A.'s speed-rapping protégée features a monstrously syncopated break beat – it's hotter than a blonde and a brunette double-teaming an ice cream cone.

PHOENIX

"1901"

Our favorite French dudes since Jacques Pépin are back with a poppy burst of bliss – it's like the first breeze of spring, except with more synthesizers.



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TICKETS

[Cont. from 15] Azoff confirmed 15 to 20 percent of tickets – “the vast majority of the best seats” – are regularly excluded from the public on-sale, and industry sources say that number could be as high as 30 percent for many shows. Those tickets make their way to the secondary market – including ticket brokers, websites like eBay and StubHub, and Ticketmaster’s own TicketsNow and TicketExchange sites – in a variety of ways.

Some artists, including Britney Spears and Fleetwood Mac, pull hundreds of the best tickets from every show and sell them on the auction site TicketExchange for as much as 10 times face value. Other top seats go to season-ticket holders at sports venues, fan clubs, media or artists’ friends and family – and those often land in the hands of brokers and scalper sites like TicketsNow and StubHub. (This is the likely reason that Dallas-based Ticket Finders USA recently had 16 tickets in Section B, Row 14, to the Jimmy Buffett show April 18th at Pizza Hut Park in Frisco, Texas.) In the murkiest cases, as Reznor suggests, artists, promoters or venues simply remove top seats from the original on-sale and shift them to scalping sites. “It’s common practice – it’s been happening for quite a long time,” says one concert-business source. “If you don’t take any and you close your eyes, it’s going to happen anyway.”

The long-running debate over ticket-scalping has intensified in recent months. In hearings before House and Senate panels to discuss the proposed merger between the world’s largest concert promoter, Live Nation, and Ticketmaster, Azoff called the increasingly lucrative secondary concert-ticket market a “mess.” He told lawmakers he wouldn’t have purchased TicketsNow, a resale site for brokers, had he been head of Ticketmaster at the time.

But Azoff’s timing for this argument was unfortunate. Just a few days before Live Nation and Ticketmaster announced

SECONDHAND SEATS
Prime tickets for Fleetwood Mac’s current tour are available on broker sites like StubHub.



BIDDING FOR BRITNEY
Tickets for Spears’ 2009 tour have sold for 10 times face value online.



THE ANTI-SCALPER
Reznor has suggested printing customers’ names on tickets to thwart resellers.

Where Do the Tickets Go?

Up to 30 percent of the best seats at some shows go straight to resale market

■ Ticketmaster works with some artists – Britney Spears, Neil Diamond – to funnel top tickets directly to its auction site, TicketExchange.

■ At large arenas, hundreds of top seats go to season-ticket holders, media or artists’ friends and family.

■ Promoters, venues and artists have also been known to sell through scalpers and brokers like StubHub.

How to Fix the Problem

To keep scalpers from getting tickets, artists are trying out new strategies

■ Tom Waits and AC/DC used paperless tickets on their 2008 tours; concertgoers had to present a credit card and ID to get into the venue.

■ Trent Reznor is proposing that customers’ names be printed on tickets.

■ Bruce Springsteen and Pearl Jam often require fans to pick up their tickets at will-call with an ID.

the merger plans in February, many fans attempting to purchase tickets for Bruce Springsteen’s tour were redirected by Ticketmaster to TicketsNow. Springsteen and his management complained bitterly. The incident drew even more scrutiny for the two companies, as Springsteen, New York Sen. Charles Schumer and New Jersey Attorney General Anne Milgram and others denounced the merger, forcing Azoff to apologize and call the sales problem a “glitch.” But a similar thing happened when Leonard Cohen tickets went on sale March 9th; the Radio City Music Hall dates sold out in seconds, and TicketExchange links popped up for frustrated fans.

Now a growing number of artists, including Reznor, Tom Petty and Springsteen, are trying to cut off scalping at the root. Reznor says printing customers’ names on the tickets will stave off resellers, and Tom Waits and AC/DC have used paperless tickets, a system in which fans present their credit cards to get into shows. But even though the technology exists to fix the problem, for most shows there’s no reason to expect things to change. “The artists are participating in it, which I don’t agree with,” says Doc McGhee, manager of Kiss. “They’re participating and basically scalping.”

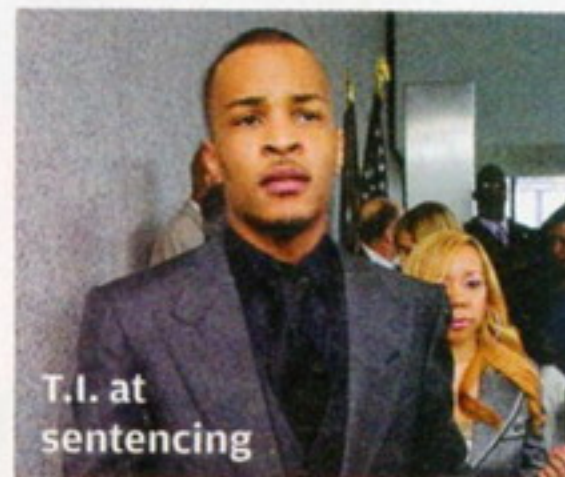
IN THE NEWS

Neil Young Set Finally Finished

After more than 20 years of work, **Neil Young’s Archives Volume 1 1963-1972** box set is hitting stores on June 2nd. “Neil’s whole life story is there,” says Archives co-producer Larry Johnson. “And it’s definitely coming out this time. It’s at the factory right now.” The 10-disc multimedia set will be available on Blu-ray (\$300), DVD (\$200) and CD (\$100). The collection contains unreleased songs, live tracks, home movies, concert footage, handwritten lyrics and press clippings spanning Young’s career from his high school band the Squires through the *Harvest* era. Additional volumes, to follow his career up to the present, are in the works. In other Young news, a Jonathan Demme-directed movie, *Neil Young Trunk Show*, documenting two 2007 Philadelphia shows, recently premiered at SXSW. The film doesn’t have a release date yet.

T.I. Sentenced to Year in Prison

T.I. has been sentenced to one year and one day in prison for attempting to purchase a cache of guns and silencers in 2007. The 28-year-old rapper



T.I. at sentencing

was facing 10 years for the crime, but he received a lenient sentence in exchange for pleading guilty and completing community service.

New Hendrix Due This Year

A CD-DVD set featuring the **Jimi Hendrix Experience’s** two-night 1969 run at London’s Royal Albert Hall will be released later this year. The package will also include extensive footage of Hendrix, who was followed by a camera crew for a month in London in 1969. Also in the works: a disc of songs that Hendrix and **Stephen Stills** recorded in Woodstock, New York. “Jimi was a workaholic,” says the guitarist’s sister Janie Hendrix. “It’s like he knew he had a limited period of time.”

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Hot Nights in Austin: SXSW's Breakouts

1,900 acts hit America's biggest music bash; here's five that tore it up

WE ARE AN UNSIGNED band from Norway," Metallica's James Hetfield joked from the outdoor stage at Stubb's in Austin. Affecting a Scandinavian accent, he added, "Maybe we get signed." The metal legends' March 20th show to pro-

BREAKING

mote their Guitar Hero video game was one of the worst-kept secrets at the annual music-industry festival South by Southwest, along with "surprise" appearances by Jane's Addiction and Kanye West. But while the more than 11,000 record-label, radio and booking pros in town didn't avoid the high-profile shows, the mission of SXSW remains the discovery of fresh talent. And with 1,900 bands from 49 countries rocking more than 88 venues, there was no shortage of new blood. Here are **ROLLING STONE's** top five finds:

1 Deer Tick

Providence, Rhode Island

"They look like children," noted ex-Drive-By Truckers guitarist Jason Isbell during Deer Tick's Friday set at Habana Bar Backyard, "but play like old men who've been doing this all their lives." This pine-tree-country band came on like hardened pioneers, with cutting twang, bull fiddle and the junior-John Prine growl of singer-guitarist John Joseph McCauley III, who sounded weary beyond his years in "Baltimore Blues No. 1."

WHAT'S NEXT Their second album, *Born on Flag Day*, is out in June. **DAVID FRICKE**

2 Little Boots

London

SXSW doesn't specialize in dance music, but U.K. electro up-and-comer Little Boots slapped on glittery frocks and blew away the crowd at Perez



Hilton's party with her super-catchy futuristic disco. Boots (real name Victoria Hesketh) played in rock bands before embracing her inner Kylie Minogue. "I didn't even want to think, 'Is this too cheesy?'" she says. Onstage with a live drummer and keyboardist, the pint-size blonde bopped to her breakout cut, "Stuck on Repeat," a club stomper produced by Hot Chip's Joe Goddard.

WHAT'S NEXT Her U.S. debut comes out in the fall. **CARYN GANZ**

3 The Strange Boys

Austin

These local stars looked like they hit SXSW straight from gym class but played an original racket with flashes of the Libertines, the R&B-era Kinks and, in singer-guitarist Ryan Sambol's distorted yelp, a young Paul Westerberg. The Strange Boys dashed through 13 songs in 35 minutes, at the same velocity as their rattling new album, ...*And Girls Club*;

Texas Flood

(1) Deer Tick's McCauley churned out twangy rock. (2) Electro-pop act Little Boots at Perez Hilton's party. (3) Garage rockers the Strange Boys. (4) St. Vincent's Clark performed in a church. (5) Indie rockers the Soft Pack.

then, with cheeky grins, bowed together like the '64 Beatles.

WHAT'S NEXT A Southern tour in April. **D.F.**

4 St. Vincent

Brooklyn

For her big SXSW showcase, Annie Clark (a.k.a. St. Vincent) performed at Austin's Central Presbyterian Church, with her band lined up in a neat row beside her. Clark's knotty art pop is also tightly arranged – and only occasionally blasphemous. "Ironically, I played 'Marry Me,' and it has the line 'We'll do what Mary and Joseph did without the kid,'" she

says. The conservatory-trained Clark, who played with the Polyphonic Spree and Sufjan Stevens' band before going solo, recalls Kate Bush and Feist with enchanted, offbeat compositions featuring violin, saxophone and clarinet, as well as her own deft guitar playing and nimble voice.

WHAT'S NEXT Her second album, *Actor*, is out May 5th. **C.G.**

5 The Soft Pack

Los Angeles

These heavily hyped indie rockers used to be called the Muslims but changed their name to the Soft Pack to avoid the hassle. Still, the band's got an off-kilter sense of humor. "We want to put a naked baby in a hat playing piano on the next seven-inch," says frontman Matt Lamkin. At an evening gig, the group tore through most of its new EP, driven by springy Gang of Four-style bass lines, brittle guitar stabs and singer-guitarist Lamkin's sneering delivery.

WHAT'S NEXT The band's first full-length album comes out in September. **C.G.**

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HEAVY SOUNDS Matthews in a New Orleans studio. DMB's seventh album is dedicated to LeRoi Moore, the band's late saxophonist.

DMB's Emotional Tribute to a Friend

Following the death of its sax player, band crafts most intense set yet

By Jenny Eliscu

THE CAR SHUTTling Dave Matthews from a private jet to producer Rob Cavallo's Los Angeles home edges onto the freeway, and the singer reaches behind the seat to grab a copy of his band's seventh studio album,

Album *Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King*
Due Out June 2nd

Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King. After rambling about the "slammin' latte" he picked up in Seattle before boarding, he debates whether the speakers in his publicist's car are up to the task. "This is a good record," Matthews says. "Even people who don't like Dave Matthews Band are going to like this record – and if they don't, then they just don't like music."

Big Whiskey is DMB's heaviest album yet, both musically and emotionally. The disc opens with an effortless cascade of unaccompanied notes by late Dave Matthews Band

saxophonist LeRoi Moore, who died last summer as a result of an ATV accident outside the band's hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia. As the album-opening interlude explodes into the deep, atmospheric funk of "Shake Me Like a Monkey," Matthews, dressed in boots, jeans and a black T-shirt, gestures to his publicist in the rearview mirror: thumb to the sky, as if to say, "Turn it up."

Moore's death came relatively early in the recording process, which began in Seattle in early 2008 and concluded with seven weeks in New Orleans this winter. DMB picked Cavallo, best known for his work with Green Day and My Chemical Romance, to help them explore more dramatic, riff-based textures. "I spoke with other people that had lots of ideas for how they would record the band," says Matthews. "Which made me think, 'Fuck you. You don't have a fucking clue how to record this band, because nobody does – yet. We have a new style.'"

Rather than falling back on its regular process – Matthews would usually bring in melodic

ideas or lyrics – the group built the tunes on brief improvised riffs it came up with in the studio. "We weren't sitting around noodling for hours," says the singer. "We would find something, play it, sit on it for 10 or 15 minutes, then stop."

After coming up with about a hundred of these fragments, the band selected 20 of them to work on more intensively. Cavallo was brought in as the

"Even people who don't like DMB will like this record," says Matthews.

group began to turn these little grooves into songs. As Matthews began to write lyrics, he kept in mind something Moore had told him about great music being honest above all else. "You just knew there was no compromise," says Cavallo. "We were there to support Dave trying to dig deeper to get down to a pure place. When all of a sudden the words started to come, it was amazing."

The album covers a wide span of moods – from the an-

themic and life-affirming "Dive In" to bawdy love songs like "Spaceman" and "Shake Me Like a Monkey" to the ominous, bombastic "Squirm." It's bigger-sounding and, at times, more adventurous than DMB's past work – the Foo Fighters-style rocker "Timebomb" finds Matthews shifting from a gentle falsetto to a scream he describes as "one of the most joyful noises I've ever made."

The band felt a special pressure to make Moore's final album as good as it could be: Throughout, drummer Carter Beauford beats out elaborate, propulsive grooves; bassist Stefan Lessard lays down Flea-style funk bass lines; violinist Boyd Tinsley plays cresting, intense runs; and Matthews mirrors Moore's saxophone lines with scatlike singing.

"There's so much LeRoi on this record," Matthews says, sipping an espresso in Cavallo's kitchen. "The greatest tragedy is that Roi's not here to see it, because he would be over the moon. He only heard four of the songs, and I remember him telling me, 'This album's going to be the best one.'"

Whipping it out April 9th



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Backstage in Asbury Park as Springsteen Preps 'Dream' Tour

Rehearsal show tackles the economy and debuts teenage drummer

By Andy Greene

DRESSED DOWN IN A pink T-shirt and jeans, Bruce Springsteen is pacing an arena-size stage crammed into the empty Asbury Park Convention Hall – a gymnasium-like structure where the band is rehearsing for its new world tour. Clarence Clemons, relaxing on a stool in a gray sweatsuit, fiddles with

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band
March 24th, Asbury Park, NJ

his sax and cracks jokes as Springsteen provides meticulous direction to the E Street Band. Tonight is the second of two open-to-the-public rehearsal shows behind the new *Working on a Dream* tour, and the group will be ironing out the last few kinks in front of an intense hometown audience. Dissatisfied with the previous night's gig, Springsteen is completely reinventing the show, and even songs that survive the set-list change are under tight scrutiny. "Just remember," he says after two consecutive run-throughs of a raved-up version of the *Nebraska* track "Johnny 99," "if we don't get it, we do it until we get it."

The tour, which kicks off April 1st in San Jose, California, comes just eight months after the last E Street Band tour and will hit multiple festivals, including Bonnaroo and Glastonbury in England. "We saw it as a good opportunity to expose Bruce to people who haven't seen him before," says Springsteen's manager, Jon Landau. "Maybe some younger people."

As the band repeatedly rehearses the show's new opening combo – "Badlands" into *Working on a Dream*'s "Outlaw Pete" – drummer Max Weinberg's 18-year-old son, Jay, hangs near his father, soaking up the energy. In June, while Max is occupied by the



REASON TO BELIEVE
Springsteen leads the E Street Band.

premiere of Conan O'Brien's *Tonight Show*, Jay will take over on drums for at least six dates of the European leg of the tour.

After the rehearsal, Jay – who plays in a New York punk group called the Reveling – sits backstage with his father and chomps chicken teriyaki while other members of the band and crew dip marshmallows

"Our band was built from the beginning for hard times," said Springsteen.

into a huge fondue fountain. Wearing a Black Flag T-shirt, Jay seems remarkably relaxed for a teenager expected to memorize 36 years of Bruce Springsteen songs and play them at sold-out soccer stadiums across Europe. "I watched them play night after night on the *Magic* tour last year," he says, pointing to his head. "All the songs are up here."

When the fans lining the boardwalk are finally let in, they get a concert 25 min-

utes shorter than the previous show's, with 10 songs that weren't played the day before. Backup singers Curtis King and Cindy Mizelle, who joined Springsteen on the 2006 *Seeger Sessions* tour, help recreate *Working on a Dream*'s Sixties-style layered harmonies. Throughout the set, Springsteen selected tunes that reflect the current economic problems – including the 1980s chestnut "Seeds," a full-band rendition of "The Ghost of Tom Joad" and a cover of the 19th-century ballad "Hard Times (Come Again No More)." "We've had an enormous moral, spiritual and economic collapse," Springsteen told Jon Stewart recently. "Our band was built from the beginning for hard times."

After a gorgeous version of the *Working on a Dream* track "Kingdom of Days," the lights turn out and Jay replaces Max at the kit. The crowd roars as the teen drummer bashes out "Lonesome Day" along with "Radio Nowhere" and "Born to Run." Springsteen's eyes shine brightly as he smiles and yells to the crowd, "What a difference a day makes!"

TOUR BRIEFS

Jonas Brothers

Five days after releasing their as-yet-untitled fourth album, the **Jonas Brothers** will kick off their world tour in Dallas on June 20th. The 50-date arena trek – with opener **Jordin Sparks** – features an elaborate set: The band will perform on a 140-foot-wide in-the-round stage. "There are more front seats, so there's a genuine connection with every fan," says **Nick Jonas**. "We've always talked about doing a tour like this."

Eric Clapton/ Steve Winwood

One year after **Eric Clapton** and **Steve Winwood**'s triumphant three-night stand at Madison Square Garden, the former Blind Faith bandmates are hitting the road for a 14-city tour kicking off on June 10th in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The pair dipped deep into Clapton's catalog during last year's shows – they played tracks from Blind Faith, Cream and Clapton's solo career. "There seems to be a lot of excitement about us playing together," Winwood tells *ROLLING STONE*. "I suppose we really do have some unfinished business."

The All-American Rejects

"We're an anomaly: a band that's doing well in this terrible global economy," says **All-American Rejects** frontman **Tyson Ritter**. To that end, the Oklahoma pop-punk quartet – whose 2008 album *When the World Comes Down* has spawned a massive hit



single, "Gives You Hell" – are "stoked to keep tickets under \$30" on their 30-date tour. Launching April 4th in Tempe, Arizona, the jaunt will highlight tunes from the group's three LPs. Pre-tour, the band is working out the kinks on new tracks like "Damn Girl" and "The Wind Blows." "It'll be a surprisingly intense rock show," says Ritter. "You're not going to put your head down for an hour and a half."

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Colin Meloy's Mellow Grooves

The Decemberists' leader on the pretty folk tunes that shaped his sound

By David Fricke

IT'S A BIG INFLUENCE ON everything I've done for the past few years," says Colin Meloy, singer-guitarist-songwriter of the Decemberists, referring to the antique songs and modernist spirit of the British folk revival of the Sixties and Seventies. The De-

INFLUENCES

cemberists' new rock opera, *The Hazards of Love*, is even named after a 1964 EP by the British singer Anne Briggs. "These old songs are a reset button for me," he says. "All the petty considerations, like 'What's the label gonna think?' go out the window."

Anne Briggs

The Hazards of Love



I became totally obsessed with the simplicity and power of her voice. Anne used

to sing unaccompanied in clubs. It's a voice with a clear, bright timbre – the tight spaces of a smoky pub would be the ideal place to hear it. There are imperfections, occasionally the flutter of a missed note, but it adds this human sheen.

Fleetwood Mac

Tusk



I was in high school, knee-deep in the Smiths. I heard this weird Lindsey Buckingham song, "I Know I'm Not Wrong" – I couldn't believe it was Fleetwood Mac. I checked out *Tusk* from my parents' collection and could not stop listening to it. It's got hits but tempered with these strange Buckingham trips – him sitting in his home studio, experimenting with sounds. He's almost impressionist punk.

Dylan Thomas

Under Milk Wood

If there is something nonmusical that has influenced me, it's this. It was a radio play – a play



FOLK FREAK
Meloy at home in Portland, Oregon

for voices, Thomas called it. It's part prose, part poetry, telling about a day in the life of a Welsh fishing village. The musicality of the language is gorgeous – if you read it aloud, you can chew the words.

Nic Jones

Ballads and Songs



This has a song called "Annan Water," which I stole for a song title on our record. It's an example of the river-as-an-obstacle motif in folk songs. In a time before lots of bridges, crossing a river was a daunting task. It's a nice metaphor, separating the protagonist from his desire. Invariably, the river wins, swallowing the person. The hazards of love in the 17th century were not an easy or pretty thing.

Big Star

Third/Sister Lovers



The first two Big Star albums are laden with pop gems. Then I got this one, and it was like, "What happened? How did the train get so derailed?" But it stuck with me. One of my favorite bits is the cowbell on "Kangaroo." This

gorgeous song is cooking along. All of a sudden, this out-of-time cowbell is the loudest thing in the mix. It's as if they're saying, "You've had enough prettiness. Now we're going to destroy the whole thing." You can hear a psyche unraveling.

Robyn Hitchcock

I Often Dream of Trains



There is something beguiling about this record – it sounds like a person in a room with a few instruments within arm's reach. And it has a consistent vibe. It sounds like it's covered in moss, surrounded by mist. A big moment for me as a writer was taking a cue from Robyn – the way he created his world so completely.

Belle and Sebastian

If You're Feeling Sinister



I remember being in college, in Portland, Oregon. I went to Ozone Records – this was on the listening station. I listened to the entire record. I missed the austerity of the Smiths and XTC. Suddenly, listening to Belle and Sebastian, I felt it was OK to do that kind of music again.

IN THE NEWS

Bruce, Vedder to Honor Pete Seeger

On May 3rd, **Bruce Springsteen**, **Eddie Vedder**, **Dave Matthews**, **John Mellencamp**, **Steve Earle**, **Joan Baez**, **Tom Morello**, **Emmylou Harris** and about 40 other musicians will toast **Pete Seeger's** 90th birthday with a benefit concert at



Madison Square Garden. "It's a huge honor," says Seeger. "Normally, I don't ever go in for big things." Proceeds from the show will go to the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater organization, a group Seeger founded in the 1960s that is dedicated to preserving and cleaning up the Hudson. "The best singing I've done in my life has been with a few dozen people," says Seeger, who will also perform. "I hope to get the whole crowd harmonizing."

IN BRIEF

■ **Eminem**, **Jimmy Page**, **Ron Wood**, **Smokey Robinson**, **Flea** and **Max Weinberg** will be among the presenters at the 2009 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Nine acts – including **Run-DMC**, **Metallica**, **Jeff Beck** and **Bobby Womack** – will be honored at the 24th annual event, which will be held on April 4th in Cleveland and televised live on Fuse.

■ After a five-year hiatus, VH1 is bringing back its **Behind the Music** series with episodes dedicated to younger musicians. The new season of the documentary show launches in July and is set to feature **Lil Wayne** and **Scott Weiland**.

■ **Nowhere Boy**, an upcoming biopic about **John Lennon's** childhood, has been cast. British actor Aaron Johnson will star as the young Beatle, and Kristin Scott Thomas will play his Aunt Mimi, who raised Lennon from the age of five. Based on *Imagine This: Growing Up With My Brother John Lennon*, a book by Lennon's half sister Julia Baird, the movie is due out later this year.

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METAL WARRIORS
Sanders, Dailor, Hinds
and Kelliher (from left) in
Summerville, Georgia

Mastodon Unleash the Beast Within

The violent, acid-fueled journey of America's new kings of metal

By Brian Hiatt

BRENT HINDS, FRONT-man and lead guitarist for Mastodon, has reached the inevitable point in the evening when his speech starts to slur. A few hours back, during a listening session for his Atlanta metal band's epic new album, *Crack the Skye*, he polished off at least six Budweiser tallboys; here at a clubby midtown Manhattan steakhouse, where his tribal forehead tattoo and reddish lumberjack's beard are comically out of place, he's deep into a procession of Jack-and-gingers. He's cracking some increasingly nasty but harmless jokes about an encounter with a female celebrity (upshot: she's fat), when he slowly begins to remember that there's a reporter at the table.

"Don't put this shit in *ROLLING STONE*," he mumbles, blue-gray eyes turning feral. His next

words are not at all slurred: "I'll kill you."

When Hinds is functional, Mastodon are the greatest metal band of their generation — no one else comes close. Their music is a gloriously chugga-chugging throwback to the epic heyday of Seventies prog-rock and the best of Eighties thrash, led by drummer Brann Dailor, a Neil Peart-style monster who writes lyrics about *Moby Dick*, crystal skulls and interstellar travel. And in Hinds they have an authentic rock & roll madman — sometimes too authentic.

The day the foursome first played together nearly a decade ago, Hinds got in a parking-lot brawl with a cook at a restaurant. Over the years, it's only gotten worse. In 2007, the guitarist almost died after a drunken incident in Las Vegas. Around 3 a.m., Hinds approached System of a Down bassist Shavo Odadjian and his friend William Hudson, swinging a wet T-shirt over his head.

"He was more wasted than any human being I've ever seen," Odadjian says. When Hinds got close with the T-shirt, Hudson smacked him — in self-defense, according to Odadjian. Hinds went down, fracturing his skull on a curb and ending up in a coma. "He sucker punched me out of nowhere and almost ended my life," Hinds says. "If I

"I've been a drunk ever since I was old enough to drink," says Hinds. "It sucks, but whatever."

ever see that dude, I will have to spend some time in prison."

At the moment, though, he's still more concerned with me. "Keep in mind, I will kill him," he tells Dailor, and then mumbles, "I'll kill you," at least one more time. But minutes later, he leans his nappy head companionably on my lap. "What

do you think about stroking my brow right now while I lay back?" he asks.

"I feel kind of weird about that."

"Just asking," he says, sitting up.

Women — pretty, well-dressed yuppie women — keep coming over to the table to talk to Hinds, to admire his tattoos, to invite him over to the bar, to suggest that they're up for partying later. "It's always like this," says Mastodon's other guitar player, Bill Kelliher, a *Star Wars* obsessive covered with tattoos of the bounty hunters from *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Hinds' female admirers don't quite know who he is, but they're fascinated, even if his idea of making small talk with a Carrie Bradshaw type in a ruffled top is to ask, "Have you ever been homeless?"

"I'm definitely an alcoholic," Hinds says, sitting in his New York hotel a couple of days later, as he cracks his first Heineken

of the day. "I've been a drunk person ever since I was old enough to drink booze. It sucks, but whatever, I can accept the truth." Ever gone to AA? "Nah," he says. "That's for losers."

THE MASTODON BRAIN trust of Hinds and Dailor get their weird lyrical ideas the old-fashioned way: "It comes from us doing too much acid," Hinds says. "Acid is the best drug in the world. It did the most amazing things for my creative psyche, and it still is doing it for me."

Seeking refuge from an operatically awful childhood, drummer-lyricist Dailor tripped almost nonstop from the age of 14 until his early 20s. "I went to high school on acid," he recalls. "Droppers filled with liquid acid on my tongue and just going for it, fully exiting what I consider to be an earthly plane. And when the acid wore off, I had a connection with that kind of music, with Frank Zappa and Yes and King Crimson."

Mastodon formed from two pairs of old friends: Hinds and bassist/co-vocalist Troy Sanders – a very tall dude with an impressively pointy metal beard (it has its own MySpace page) and an air of calm authority – played together in Atlanta, while Dailor and guitarist Kelliher slogged away in Rochester, New York. Dailor worked night shifts in a porn shop (he was spared the task of cleaning the video booths: "Roland the jizz mopper took care of that") and in a convenience store that was constantly robbed. Hinds had steady work as a carpenter but was so messed up that colonies of lice took residence in the green dreadlocks he used to have.

In 2000, Kelliher and Dailor moved to Atlanta, befriending the other two within weeks. The music they started making drew from an impressively diverse set of influences: the Melvins, the psychedelic metal act Neurosis, Rush, Genesis, Metallica, ZZ Top and Kiss. Over long, pot-fueled drives in their van, Dailor introduced the others to his favorites. "I grew up with all this awesome music," says the drummer. "David Bowie, Peter Gabriel, Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder,



Masters of Disaster

(1) Mastodon and Metallica at London's Wembley Stadium in 2007. **(2)** Hinds and Sanders in Las Vegas in 2007, hours before Hinds' near-fatal fight. **(3)** Dailor and his late sister, Skye, in 1980. Mastodon's new LP is named after her.

Marvin Gaye – down the line, all the real shit. All the real shit that doesn't exist anymore. That's what I hope Mastodon is. I want Mastodon so badly to be able to be spoken in the same breath as that stuff."

The name Mastodon came from one of Kelliher's many *Star Wars* tattoos, of an elephantlike creature called a bantha. Recalls Dailor, "Brent was like, 'What's that other animal, the other elephant thing, not the woolly mammoth but the other one?' He was like, 'The matador?' And Bill was like, 'No, the mastodon.' And it just sounded badass."

The band formed in the era of Korn and Limp Bizkit, but Mastodon hated that stuff: The sound they've developed is as classic-metal as it gets: lengthy, impeccably

looking down on planets and stuff." His journey was eventually interrupted by a sharp pain in the groin – he was somewhere near Saturn, he estimates, when a nurse began to change his catheter. "Right when she touched my penis to take it out, I bolted up and projectile-vomited on everybody in the room. It looked like sangria. It was like 24 PBRs and a gallon of Crown Royal and fruit. Then I was done; I was out of the coma. I had lost weight – I looked great."

Hinds started writing music for what became *Crack the Skye* as he recovered, sitting on his couch in his underwear, smoking weed, playing his Martin acoustic. It hurt to scream, so he sang instead – on the record, he suddenly sounds like Ozzy Osbourne. The other guys, who have been writing some of the heaviest music Mastodon have ever made, eagerly switched directions when they heard what

Hinds had created. Lyricist Dailor was particularly inspired: "I knew Brent was coming from a deeper place, so I knew I had to go deeper with the lyrics."

Astral travel figures into the plot of *Crack the Skye*, which the band recorded with producer Brendan O'Brien (AC/DC and Pearl Jam). On the surface, it's an outré sci-fi tale – a paraplegic boy's soul travels back in time to enter Rasputin's body, etc. But its subtext of loss and dislocation and rage is really as agonizingly personal as rock music can get.

Dailor, a sardonic, perpetually straight-faced blond guy, looked to his childhood for inspiration: He says his first stepdad was a druggie who hit and choked him, his mom and his sister, Skye. His mom sang in a cover band that specialized in Rush; Stepdad was the drummer. "I was coming home from school, and my mom was doubled over on the fuckin' carpet looking for coke," says Dailor.

Dailor's drumming style comes from this period of his life. "There's a violence that's in there, and that's something that I can't really put into words – it has to be played out with drums," he says. "There's mo-

composed tunes spiced with psychedelized guitar heroics and Hinds' unexpected hints of country and blues. Beginning with their major-label debut, 2006's *Blood Mountain*, Mastodon moved away from modern metal's melody-sparse barking toward actual singing – *Crack the Skye* even has three-part harmonies. Their already wide fan base – which ranges from typical headbangers and rock critics to hipsters and famous musicians (Dave Grohl, Pearl Jam, even Björk) – is poised to grow further. "They're heavy," says PJ's Jeff Ament, "but their beautiful parts are more beautiful than most pop bands."

AFTER HINDS' FIGHT in Las Vegas, he spent three days in a coma. "I was totally astral-traveling. I had the most enlightening, loving feeling. I specifically remember being in outer space,

ments when I'm playing the drums, and you're looking at a little kid that's being hit, at a little kid that's watching his mother be dragged up the stairs. When I'm playing fast drumrolls and hitting cymbals, you'll see my face, and that's what's going on."

The worst of it came when Dailor was 15 and already playing in his first band, Maniacal Rage. His sister, who had always been defiant in the face of the abuse ("She was always getting the real brunt of the stuff because she would just be up in the dude's face, like, 'Fuck you!'") had a humiliating encounter with some bullies one day. She went home and took a lethal dose of painkillers from her mother's drawer.

Something inside Brann broke when he found out. "I let

Says Dailor, "When I play drums, you're looking at a little kid who's being hit."

out this giant scream, my knees buckled, and I fell down," he recalls. "So that's the crack in the sky, that's the reason the album's named *Crack the Skye*. It's for that moment you find out someone close to you is gone."

One night, Dailor dropped acid and went to the cemetery: "She was freshly buried, and I tried to dig and get in there with her, and take the fucking tomb off." The *Skye* track "The Czar" includes the line "I see your face in constellations." "That's from me laying in the dirt and staring up at the stars and seeing her face, and knowing that she was telling me to stop." After that, he spent a month in a mental institution. "When I listen to *Crack the Skye* and it gets to certain spots, it kills me. I don't even know why I did that to myself. It's just what came out. It needed to be written."

SITTING IN HIS NEW YORK hotel, a sleepy Brent Hinds is wearing a hideous brown poncho with white birds on it. He borrowed it from a friend for his ROLLING STONE interview, in tribute to one of his heroes, Stevie Ray

Vaughan – he's under the mistaken impression that Vaughan wore a similar outfit on an RS cover. Hinds loves Vaughan – "Pendulous Skin," from Mastodon's previous album, is an obvious tribute. Hinds' initial guitar inspirations were Angus Young and Billy Gibbons – his first concert was a date on the *Eliminator* tour. At the moment, he's wearing a belt buckle with a picture of Ace Frehley on it. "My dad's cool as hell," says Hinds, who grew up in a churchgoing Alabama family, "but in an asshole move, he made me learn the banjo before he would buy me a guitar. So I was learning all this hillbilly music with my uncle, and then I focused on being an awesome guitar player. My mom would come in and say, 'Are you OK? You haven't been out of your room in two days.' I'd be like, 'Don't worry, I'm not masturbating, I'm playing guitar.'"

Now, he can rip through Mastodon's time-signature-shifting tunes even when he's breathtakingly wasted. "It's not complex to me, it's complex to you," he says. "To me, it's a walk in the park." When he's sober, Hinds is sweet and disarmingly charming – he's not sure why his behavior can turn ugly when he drinks. "Who knows what gets on your nerves? It could be a million things. It could be a woman. I'm a glutton for lady punishment."

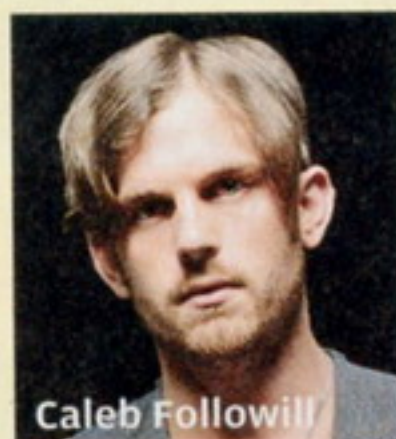
Hinds calls over a friend – Bridget, a pretty African-American woman in a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. It turns out he met her backstage at a Guns n' Roses show in 2006, when she was a recent college graduate – she was one of the good-looking women Axl Rose had invited backstage. "He wrangles a patch of girls," Hinds says. "He'll have, like, 15 of the most killer girls. Every girl was hot as hell." When Bridget chose Hinds over Rose, Axl got upset. "He told me, 'You're a living nightmare,'" Hinds recalls with pride. "I said, 'Sweet dreams, motherfucker.' I took her from him, basically."

Hinds loves women, but he doesn't exactly trust them. "I don't trust you, I don't trust her, I don't trust me," he says. "Fuck, no! Anyone not in the band, I do not trust you."

Smoking Section

BY AUSTIN SCAGGS

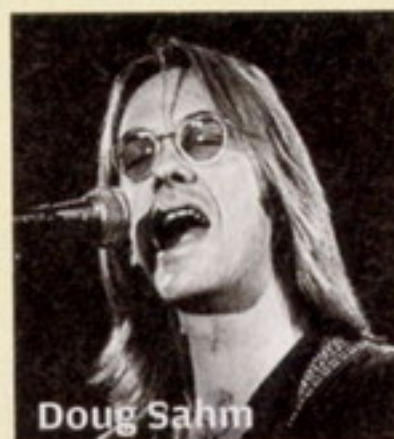
It would have been great to click our heels three times to return from Australia, but the 30-hour trek gave us adequate time to reflect on the trip – one of the craziest adventures of our life. Right after checking in to the Park Hyatt Sydney, we hit the rooftop pool, where we ran into **Coldplay**, whose *Viva la Vida* tour is still danc-



Caleb Followill

ing around the globe. The next day, we were soaking up the sun right next to one of our heroes, **Pete Townshend**! And one night at the hotel bar, we let **Kylie Minogue** DJ with our iPod (who knew she liked Fela Kuti?). The rest of the time we played golf, hit the beaches and partied with the **Kings of Leon**, who played nine sold-out shows Down Under. We would've scaled majestic Sydney Harbour Bridge with the boys, but that would have required passing a Breathalyzer test. And as singer **Caleb Followill** said, "There is absolutely no time during the day that I could pass a Breathalyzer."

At SXSW, there was a huge line to get into a tribute to the late **Doug Sahm**, the Texas songwriter who left an indelible mark on rock & roll, country and Tex-Mex with his bands, the **Sir Douglas Quintet** and the **Texas Tornados**. "My dad was a vital link in the Texas musical food chain," says **Shawn Sahm**, who appeared on the



Doug Sahm

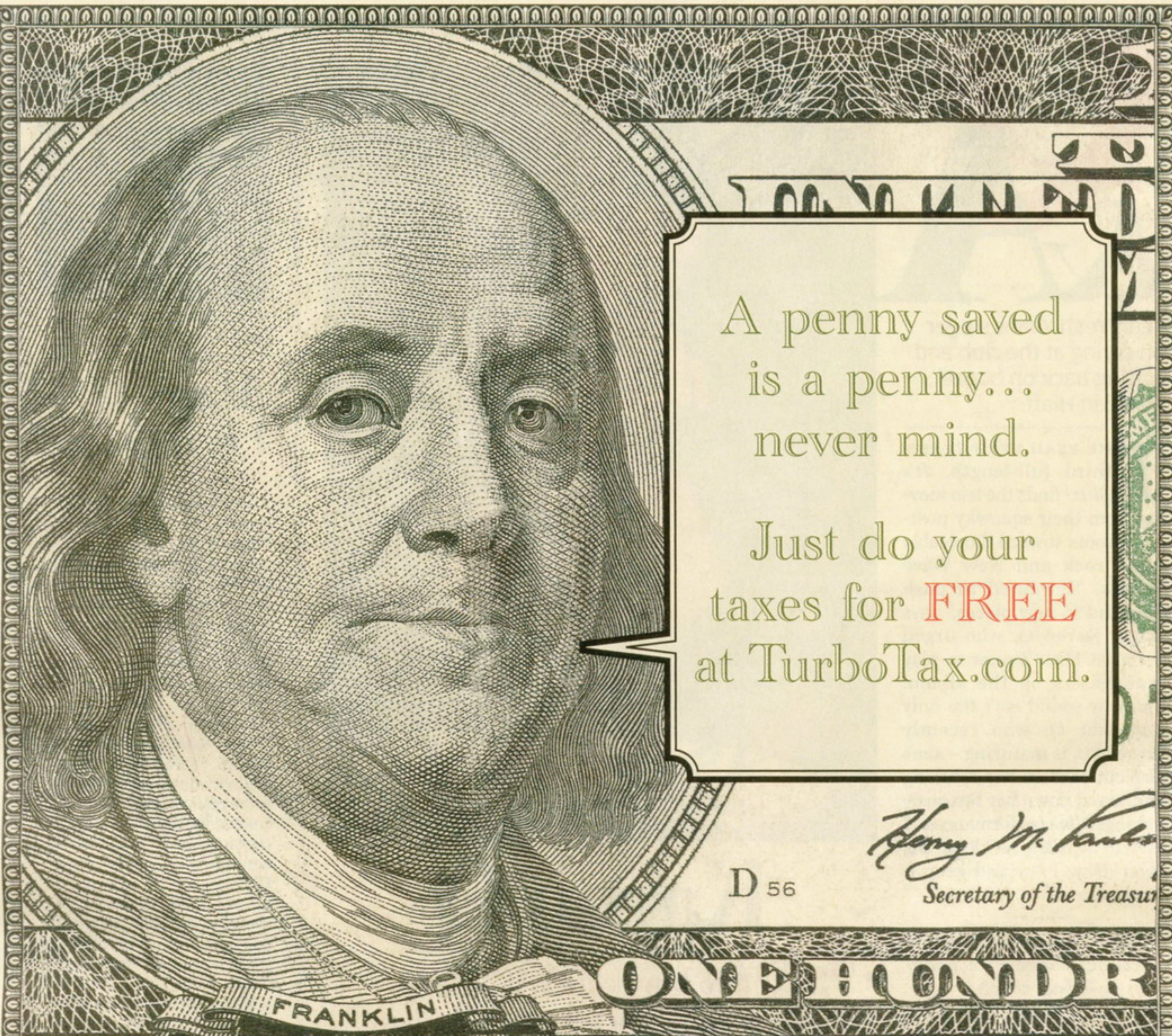
cover of RS (at age three) and has organized a handful of tributes to commemorate the 10th anniversary of his pop's death. The recently released *Keep Your Soul* features interpretations of Sahm songs by admirers like **Jimmie Vaughan**, **Los Lobos** and **Delbert McClinton**. Also in the works: a box set, a book and a new CD from the Tornados that was recorded before **Freddy Fender**'s death in 2006. "It's a magical record," says Shawn. "We want to keep Pop's name out there, turn kids on to him and keep fans and friends groovin'."

Last year, the **Fleet Foxes** turned the S.S. onto *Cold Fact*, the long-out-of-print 1970 debut by **Sixto Rodriguez**, which was reissued in '08. Rodriguez, born in Detroit in 1942 to Mexican immigrant parents, wrote songs about the plight of the inner-city poor, using wordplay that can only be described as Dylanesque. "Dylan influenced everybody," Rodriguez tells



Sixto Rodriguez

us from his daughter's house (he doesn't have his own phone). "He created a social consciousness, he found a deeper message." In May, Rodriguez's second album, 1971's *Coming From Reality*, will be re-released. Our favorite cut, "A Most Disgusting Song" is as hardcore as "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and features this killer line: "The mafia provides your drugs, your government will provide the shrugs, and the National Guard will supply the slugs."



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Q & A

Yeah Yeah Yeahs singer on crying at the club and cutting back on booze
By Brian Hiatt

THE YEAH YEAH YEAHS' third full-length, *It's Blitz!* finds the trio moving from their squawky post-punk roots toward danceable synth rock and New Wave ballads. "I wanted to push the band to new places," says singer Karen O, who urged guitarist Nick Zinner to play synthesizers on the album. The new sound isn't the only way that O, who recently turned 30, is maturing – she's also cut back on her drinking and toned down her famously unhinged live performances. "I used to be really reckless," she says. "Now I try and keep it semireckless."

This album has an Eighties feel, but what did you really listen to back then?

"We Are the World," I remember that. *The Chipmunks Do Country* [laughs]. Michael Jackson made a big impression on me. I was not hip whatsoever. I didn't get into rock until probably the ninth grade, when a friend started going to Sonic Youth, Pavement and Jonathan Fire*Eater shows in Manhattan.

What specific music did you draw on for this album?

Talking Heads, Tom Tom Club, Suicide, New Order were all references. I wanted to nail a song that had a hypnotic and ecstatic appeal – and could make people cry on the dance floor, too.

Has a song ever made you cry on the dance floor?

There was a moment with "Love Will Tear Us Apart" in a club in New York when I really teared up. It was a feeling of real emotional joy. Generally, I'm geared more toward tears of joy than anguish.

Your label head, Jimmy Iovine, put Chris Cornell to-



Karen O

"It's fun to hurt yourself onstage – there's a punk-rock appeal about it."

gether with Timbaland. Did he try that with you guys?

Not Timbaland, no. People like that, though – it came up after our last record. Jimmy used to talk to me about the whole Blondie crossover thing. The thing is, if you work with a producer like Timbaland or someone not in your genre, it feels like there's a purpose: "I want to make a hit with this person."

You don't drink as much as you used to. Does that make it harder to go insane onstage?

In the end, I don't need the booze to connect. It's just that I get nervous, and sometimes I feel that's the medicine that's going to make it happen. You can perform a lot better sober, too – you stay in tune more. Now I just take a gulp of something before I go on.

You hurt yourself pretty badly onstage in Australia

once. Did that change your performances?

I don't hang over the edge of the stage as much as I used to. It's fun to hurt yourself onstage – there's a nostalgic punk-rock appeal about it – but you don't want to end up in a hospital.

Do you consider yourself the leader of the band?

No, I don't. As far as songwriting goes, it's an even split between Nick and me. We're extremely different, but we find this common ground. That "opposites attract" aspect of it makes it what it is in the end.

But you pushed Nick to play less guitar on the record – it's hard to imagine that he could push you to sing less.

That's true – he'd be a dead man. I don't know if that makes me the leader, really. The music comes from the dynamic between us. Even if I'm kind of... leading it [laughs].

OBITUARIES



Livingston (center) with the Beatles in February 1964

Alan Livingston

1917-2009

Alan Livingston, the Capitol Records president who brought the Beatles to America, died in Beverly Hills on March 13th. He was 91. Although the label initially passed on issuing the band's early U.K. records in the States, it was Livingston – at the urging of Beatles manager Brian Epstein – who finally gave the go-ahead to release "I Want to Hold Your Hand" in the U.S. in 1963. A record executive with an unusually diverse résumé, Livingston also created the Bozo the Clown character and resuscitated Frank Sinatra's career in the Fifties by pairing the singer with arranger Nelson Riddle. During Livingston's tenure at Capitol in the Sixties, the label signed the Beach Boys and the Band. "He saw a record label as a forum for the arts," says Don McLean, another act Livingston worked with closely. "Look at what he did with the Beatles and the Beach Boys. He could've said, 'Let's put the boys in tuxedos.' But he knew how to do it right."

DAVID BROWNE

Eddie Bo

1929-2009

A New Orleans pianist and singer who worked with and wrote for artists like Etta James and Little Richard, Eddie Bo died of a heart attack on March 18th at 79. Bo's career spanned R&B, rock & roll and funk; his hits included 1961's "Check Mr. Popeye" and 1969's "Hook and Sling."

Uriel Jones

1934-2009

A member of Motown's Funk Brothers session band, drummer Uriel Jones died of natural causes on March 24th at 74. Jones played on Motown classics like "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" and "The Tracks of My Tears."




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"Octomom is shocking. It finally happened. I'm shocked." —Perry Farrell, 20 years after *Nothing's Shocking*

Random Notes



Morrissey (left) and Yorke show off their rippling man-chests.

Thom and Moz Take It Off

Thousands of innocent Brazilians relaxing at Rio's Ipanema Beach complained of temporary blindness as Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke exposed a little too much lily-white flesh on a recent jog. Meanwhile, at an intimate gig in New York, Morrissey sweated through a flannel shirt before ripping it off and feeding it to a packed house of ravenous Moz worshippers.



RAINING MEN
In the clip for his new single "We Made You," Eminem drives excellently, wears Kmart undies and counts cards, with help from co-stars Dr. Dre and 50 Cent.



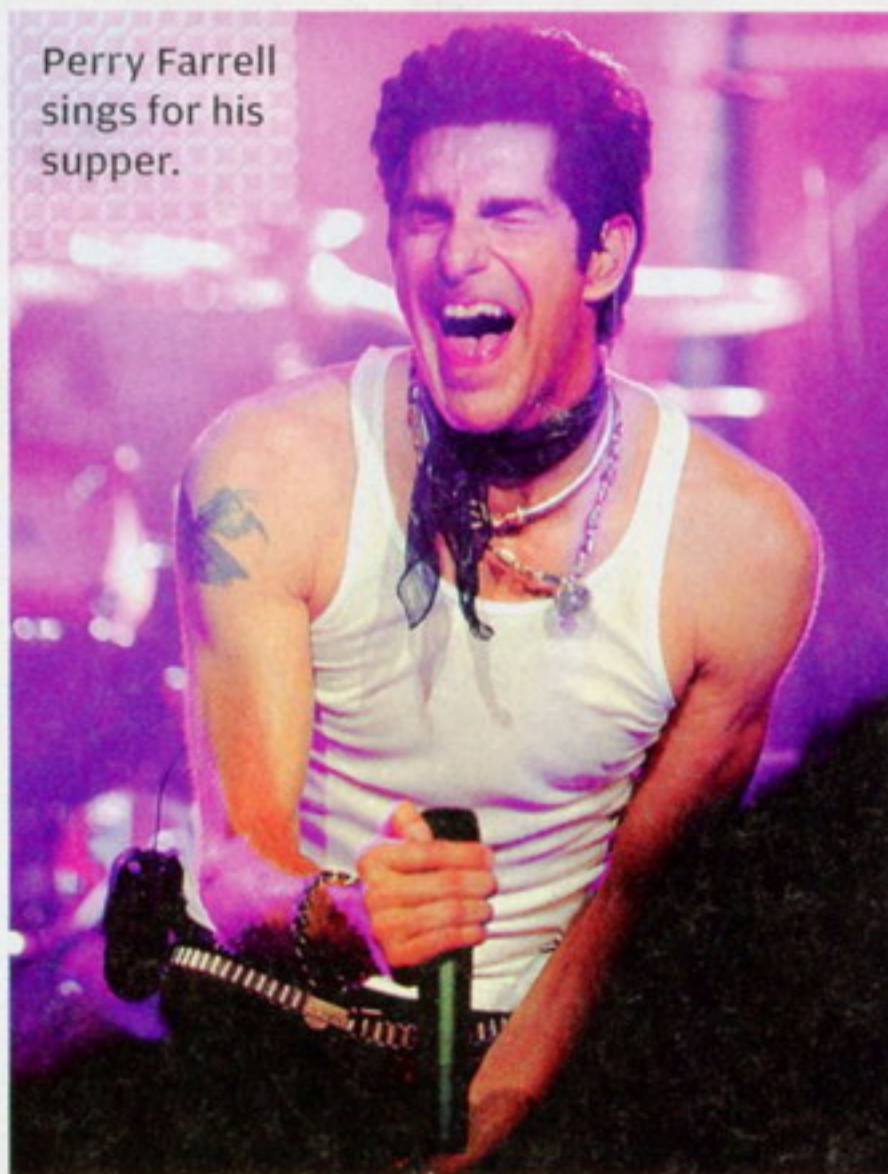
SUPERWOMEN
In honor of Women's History Month, Michelle Obama invited Alicia Keys and other female power players to the White House.



THE LADY IS A VAMP
Rolling through Chicago on her first headlining tour, pants-hating pop princess Lady Gaga brought her futuristic shtick and disco cane to the stage.



Will work for BBQ:
James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett shred.



Perry Farrell
sings for his supper.

Superstars Take Over SXSW

Thousands of aspiring young musicians migrated to Austin for the annual SXSW festival, but luckily there were some veterans to keep the kids' egos in check. Metallica melted faces under the alias Volsung at a packed gig at Stubb's, celebrating the release of their very own edition of Guitar Hero. Meanwhile, Jane's Addiction took over an abandoned Safeway near Interstate 35, rocking classics like "Three Days" from the freezers to the produce section.



Aretha partying
with Detroit judge Damon Keith

Aretha Scores a Hat Trick

Aretha Louise Franklin celebrated her 67th in style, digging into a cake shaped like the bedazzled bonnet she rocked at the inauguration. In a far less dignified ceremony, skeezy lothario Flavor Flav rang in his 50th with a Vegas ho-fest.



PIANO PALS
Elton John and Billy Joel snuggle up after a long, sweaty gig full of ivory tickling in Houston.



DR. STRANGE GLOVE
MJ left a Beverly Hills doctor's office with his son, Prince Surgical Cap.



Flavor Flav
gets toasty.



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Obama's Sheriff

Under Bush, the Interior Department was as lawless as the Wild West. But can the new secretary bring the wrongdoers to justice?

★ By Tim Dickinson ★

AS TOP OFFICIALS IN THE Obama administration settle into their new offices, they are just now beginning to uncover some of the worst abuses committed by their predecessors. And of all the corruption that characterized the Bush years, none is more shocking – and more responsible for lasting damage – than the pervasive scandals and cronyism at the federal agency charged with managing one-fifth of America's land.

Under Bush, the Interior Department became a lawless bureaucracy that actively worked to enrich the nation's most powerful energy interests. Top-level officials secretly allowed oil companies to keep billions in royalties owed to taxpayers, opened up 26 million acres of federal land to oil and gas drilling, denied wilderness protection to another 220 million acres, rewrote scientific reports to eliminate safeguards for endangered species, and even snorted coke and had sex with

the very oil interests they were supposed to be regulating. "It was Dodge City," says Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat from Oregon who chairs the Senate Energy Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests.

But unlike some Democrats in Washington who insist that it's time to "turn the page" on past misdeeds, newly appointed Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is already showing a determination to hold the Bush administration accountable for its wrongdoing. Sporting his signature Stetson, the secretary casts himself as the man in the white hat – a new sheriff in town, come to restore law and order. In his first two months in office, Salazar has done more than simply reverse many of the Bush administration's worst moves, including the authorization of gas drilling within sight of Utah's national parks. He and his top deputy, Tom Strickland – both of whom served as attorney general of Colorado – have also initiated a top-to-bottom investigation of what Salazar calls the "blatant

and criminal conflicts of interest and self-dealing" that took place in Interior.

"We've got to make sure this mess gets cleaned up," Salazar tells *ROLLING STONE*, revealing that he has already referred evidence of wrongdoing to the Justice Department for possible prosecution. According to the secretary, he's looking at "criminal behavior that extended to the very highest levels. The 'anything goes' era is over."

DURING THE BUSH ERA, THE scandals over America's wilderness areas were centered at the Mineral Management Service, the Denver office that serves as Interior's collection agency. The government auctions off the right to drill on public lands, and taxpayers are supposed to receive a cut of any profits that energy firms make on the oil and gas they extract. Last year, MMS collected more than \$23 billion in royalties from drilling – second

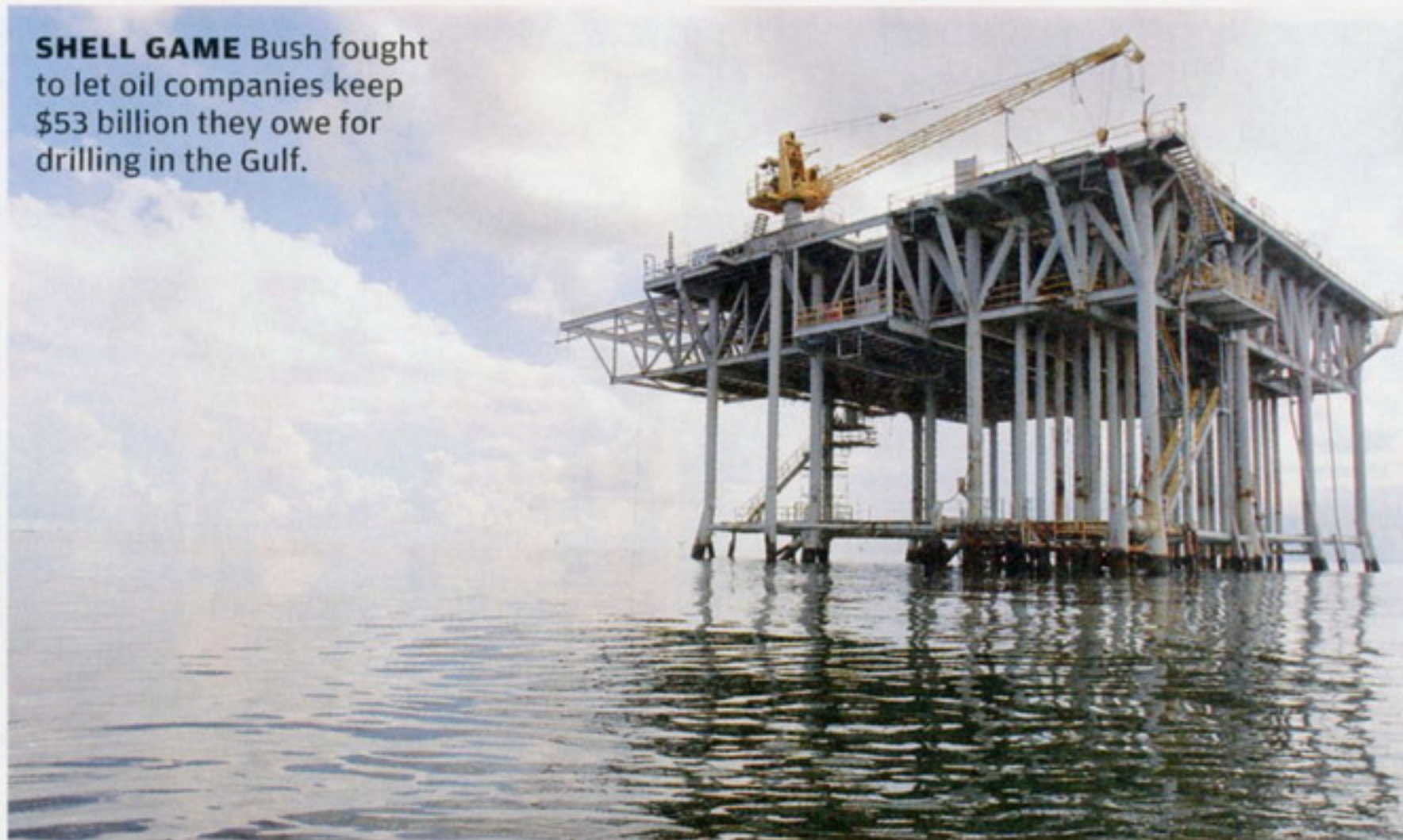
in revenues only to the IRS. "The oil companies were basically running MMS during the Bush years," says Bobby Maxwell, a top auditor for the service who was forced out of his job in 2005, despite having recovered more than \$500 million in unpaid royalties during his career.

Maxwell and other auditors sensed the change in direction as soon as Bush took office: Collections of unpaid royalties from oil and gas companies plunged from \$300 million a year to less than \$50 million. "The focus changed," says Maxwell. "It was 'Quit doing detailed audits. Stop getting records from oil companies.'" The push was no longer to collect money owed to taxpayers for drilling on public land – it was to provide what the Bush administration euphemistically called "royalty relief" to big energy firms.

MMS not only slashed audits by 22 percent, it even prohibited auditors from recouping money in cases involving clear evidence of fraud. In what would become the costliest scandal, it also looked the other way when it learned that, because of a massive bureaucratic fuck-up, it had failed to collect billions in royalties for deep-water drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. Instead, the Bush administration fought to let oil companies keep the money, and a judge appointed by Bush recently overturned royalty collections on 75 percent of all oil produced in the Gulf. Should the ruling stand, taxpayers will forfeit as much as \$53 billion owed by Big Oil.

As another favor to oil and gas companies, MMS also set up an office called "Royalty in Kind," allowing drilling interests to pay the government not in cash but in petroleum products. The RIK office would then sell those products on the open market, bringing in some \$4 billion a year. But since the office owned no pipe-

SHELL GAME Bush fought to let oil companies keep \$53 billion they owe for drilling in the Gulf.



lines or refineries, it was forced to extend lucrative contracts to the oil companies to transport and process the oil – taking another costly bite out of the revenue owed to taxpayers.

Instead of negotiating tough deals with the oil companies, officials in the royalties office indulged in what an internal investigation later termed "a culture of substance abuse and promiscuity." A third of RIK staff members, the investigation found, accepted illicit gifts from the industry. Others "used cocaine and marijuana, and had sexual relations with oil and gas company representatives." One pair of government-employees-gone-wild, celebrated among oilmen as the "MMS Chicks," partied hard during corporate snowboarding trips – one got so drunk at a ski resort that Shell had to put her up for the night in its "Dutchman Haus" chalet – and repeatedly had sex with representatives for Chevron and Shell. The "Chicks" did not recuse themselves from negotiations with

the companies. Worse, they allowed Chevron and other firms to revise the terms of 118 contracts that had already been finalized – favors to the industry that cost taxpayers \$4.4 million.

"They were literally and figuratively in bed with the oil industry," says Maxwell.

The director of the Royalty in Kind office, Greg Smith, was apparently too busy worrying about where his next line of coke was coming from to rein in his underlings. According to Interior's inspector general, Smith regularly bought cocaine from a subordinate, offering her a \$250 "performance award" as a reward for provisioning him with quality "office supplies." When Smith wasn't high – or pressuring women on his staff for blow jobs, as the inspector general found he did repeatedly – he was busy accepting payments from an oil-services consulting firm in return for insider information about the RIK program.

When the inspector general sent his findings to the Justice Department, how-

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN RUSSELL/AP IMAGES; ISTOCK PHOTO; NO CREDIT; ALEX BRANDON/AP IMAGES; CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP IMAGES; NEWSOM; RAMA; NASSER NASSER/AP IMAGES; NO CREDIT, 2; ISTOCK PHOTO, 2

THREAT ASSESSMENT

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY

Bush presidential memoir fetches \$8 million less than Clinton's.



Canadian activist constructs "shoe cannon" to fire footwear in protest of Bush's visit.



Energy Secretary Steve Chu spikes nuclear-waste storage at Yucca Mountain.



Special Olympics bowling champ challenges Obama to 10 frames.



WITH US

Recession curbs 300 million metric tons of U.S. carbon emissions.



Reversing Bush, U.S. signs U.N. declaration calling for decriminalization of homosexuality.



International Criminal Court issues arrest warrant for Sudan's president for war crimes in Darfur.



Justice Department ends raids on medical-pot dispensaries.

Shotgun marriage of Bristol Palin backfires.



Sen. Chuck Grassley calls on AIG execs to follow "Japanese example: Resign, or go commit suicide."

ever, the Bush administration suddenly went soft on drugs, declining to prosecute Smith. It also failed to charge Lucy Denet, a former associate director of MMS, whom the inspector general said "manipulated the contracting process" to steer \$1.1 million in government business to a company run by two outgoing MMS agents, both of whom have pleaded guilty to felony violations of conflict of interest. Many Interior insiders believe that both Denet and Smith are prime candidates for prosecution under Salazar. Speaking to *ROLLING STONE*, the secretary refused to speculate about which former officials are now in legal jeopardy, but says that his investigation extends beyond the corruption at MMS to the entire depart-

even further. "Given the billions of dollars at stake and the number of people involved," she said, "this is easily the worst instance of government misconduct we have ever seen."

THE COKE-AND-SEX-CRAZED atmosphere at MMS may have been the most flagrant scandal at Interior during the Bush years, but it was far from the only one. "The place was like a vending machine," says Sen. Wyden. "The special interests could line up, and out would come the policies they were interested in." Insiders and government watchdogs say four other abuses typified the Bush approach to public resources:

Staff members at Interior had sex and cut deals with representatives from Chevron and Shell, while their boss snorted coke.

ment. "I am being cautious as a former prosecutor," he says. "I can't tell you everything I know."

Even by Washington standards, the level of corruption at MMS was mind-boggling – far worse than the notorious bribe-for-drilling scandal that defined the administration of Warren G. Harding. "The previous low point for the Interior Department was the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s," says Jeff Ruch, executive director of a federal watchdog group called Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. "Right now we've got Teapot Dome cubed."

Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, goes

MORE DRILLING The Bush administration's determination to open the West to drilling verged on the pathological. Between 2001 and 2007, government figures show, Interior leased *five percent* of its entire holdings to energy firms for development. In its frenzy to bring new wells online, the Interior Department relied on "volunteers" paid by oil and gas companies to help rubber-stamp new drilling permits. In the end, the permits actually outstripped the capacity of oil and gas companies to keep up: Less than half of the acreage auctioned off under Bush is in production. For all of the violence done to the Western landscape in the past eight years – a toll visible to anyone on a cross-coun-

try flight looking down on the thousands of new wells that pockmark the Rockies – the oil companies can drill another 15 million acres without having to apply for a single new lease. And taxpayers will be left to handle the toxic aftermath: Under rules formalized by Bush, cleanup of oil and gas drilling is now purely voluntary.

MORE FAVORS Oil and gas lobbyists had a direct pipeline into Interior, thanks to Steven Griles. In 2001, Griles left a lucrative lobbying practice to become deputy secretary of the department – but he never ceased his lobbying. His partner continued to pay him \$284,000 a year, and former clients regularly called on him to grease the regulatory skids for them. "Steven Griles was an all-purpose fixer," says Ruch, the director of PEER. "Whatever a lobbyist would call him up and complain about, he'd fix." This was especially true for disgraced GOP lobbyist Jack Abramoff, whom federal prosecutors say enjoyed "secret, unique, sustained and unfettered access" to Griles. The deal was simple: Abramoff steered more than \$500,000 to a pro-Bush group run by one of Griles' girlfriends; Griles did favors for Abramoff's clients. Griles – one of the few Interior officials to be punished – was sentenced to 10 months in federal prison for committing perjury about the extent of his dealings with Abramoff.

LESS WILDLIFE Julie MacDonald, a deputy assistant secretary at Interior, routinely overruled the department's biologists, limiting the amount of "critical habitat" protected from drilling and other development. Federal judges overturned several of her decisions as "arbitrary and capricious," and among federal scientists her name became synonymous with political interference. "It became a verb for us: getting MacDonalded," said one staff-

Volcano whose stimulus-funded monitoring **Bobby Jindal** mocked erupts near Anchorage.



Newt Gingrich says he will "look seriously" at **2012 run**.

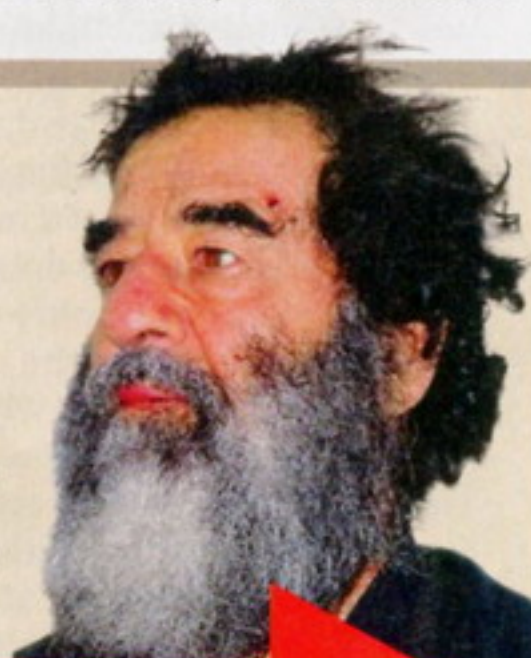
Iraq War turns six.



Sarah Palin rejects \$36 million in stimulus funding for **kids with disabilities**.



Condi Rice **rewrites history**: "No one was arguing that Saddam Hussein somehow had something to do with 9/11."



• AGAINST US •

Dick Cheney: Obama decisions "raise the risk to the American people of **another attack**."



Kim Jong Il vote count in "re-election": **100 percent**.

Unemployment of Iraq and Afghanistan **vets** surpasses 11 percent.

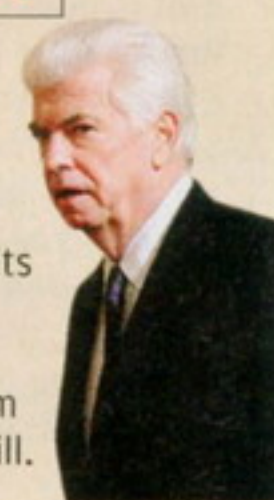


Summer sea ice in Arctic projected to **disappear** in 2013.

Congress approves \$4,700 **annual raises** – for Congress.



Sen. Chris Dodd admits **stripping bonus limits** from stimulus bill.



er with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. When the inspector general reviewed 20 listings for endangered species in which MacDonald played a role, he found that she had "potentially jeopardized" 13 of them – a track record that "cast doubt on nearly every [endangered species] decision issued during her tenure." Her decisions frequently benefited private interests, including her own: Her ruling that the Sacramento splittail fish is not an endangered species protected her family farm in California – an operation that clears as much as \$1 million a year.

DECAYING PARKS By the time Bush left office, the National Park Service was stuck with a backlog of up to \$14 billion in deferred maintenance. The marquee attraction at Dinosaur National Monument – a rock face of exposed Jurassic fossils – remains off-limits because the visitor center is unsafe, and inadequate storage facilities threaten to damage artifacts from the Battle of Little Big Horn. Because of the lack of funds, the government was unable to buy land surrounding Valley Forge and Zion National Park, putting the property at risk for "detrimental de-

velopment." Worst of all, the administration's failure to create a grazing plan at Yellowstone Park to accommodate the plains buffalo – the animal that graces the Interior Department's seal – contributed to the deaths of more than 1,100 bison last year. It was the greatest buffalo slaughter since the species was driven to near extinction by hunters in the late 1800s.

AS OBAMA'S MAN AT INTERIOR, Salazar has wasted no time in creating real change. In his first weeks on the job, the secretary delighted critics on the left by canceling 77 oil and gas leases that Bush had authorized near Utah's national parks, including ones that would have put oil derricks within eyesight of both Arches and Dinosaur. Salazar also delayed Bush's timeline for opening the Eastern seaboard and California coast to drilling – terming it "a headlong rush of the worst kind." And he shelved Bush's plan for oil-shale mining in the Rockies, announcing instead an aggressive initiative to develop renewable-energy installations on federal lands.

The new administration, Salazar tells *ROLLING STONE*, is seeking to recoup the billions in federal revenue lost to "royalty relief" by implementing a new excise tax on drilling profits in the Gulf. And he pledges a thorough review of Interior's royalty policies – for both onshore and offshore drilling – to ensure the American people receive a "fair market return" in exchange for natural resources. "We are pursuing a 21st-century land and water conservation effort that will hopefully surpass what Teddy Roosevelt did for this country almost 100 years ago," Salazar says.

But in other areas, critics say, the Interior secretary has betrayed his allegiances as a longtime rancher and conservative Democrat. After a brief review of one of Bush's most controversial decisions, Salazar concurred with the previous administration's call to remove the gray wolf from endangered-species status. "We all expected more from the Obama administration," said Rodger Schlickeisen, president for Defenders of Wildlife. "All the reasons why this plan was a bad idea when the Bush administration proposed it still stand today. If this rule is allowed, nearly two-thirds of the wolves in the northern Rockies could be killed."

While environmentalists plan to sue to block the decision, which they believe was based on "MacDonaldded" science, Salazar's decision has won praise from conservative Democrats who forged a crucial part of Obama's electoral coalition in Western states. Salazar, for his part, is unapologetic. "I'm not here to please the environmental community," he says. "From my point of view it was a science-based decision."

In another disturbing move, Salazar placed an additional 1.2 million acres of Western land on the auction block, inviting oil and gas companies to bid on drilling leases. And in his opening address at Interior, he preached the virtues of far-fetched technologies like "clean coal" and "carbon capture and sequestration," emphasizing that "oil and gas and coal resources are very much a part of the equation for our energy future."

While few question Salazar's determination to stamp out the criminal legacy of the Bush administration, longtime observers wonder whether the Colorado rancher has the gumption to truly overhaul a department that – even under Democratic administrations – has long catered to profit-seekers over the public interest. "Salazar is the Old West – that's what the cowboy boots and bolo ties are all about," says Phil Doe, a former top regulator at Interior. "His friends are the people who have run the system for so long. The boot-and-buckle boys – they understand each other. How is he going to make a break from these people? I don't think he can. I don't think he knows how."

THE END OF DENIAL

EPA Acts on Climate

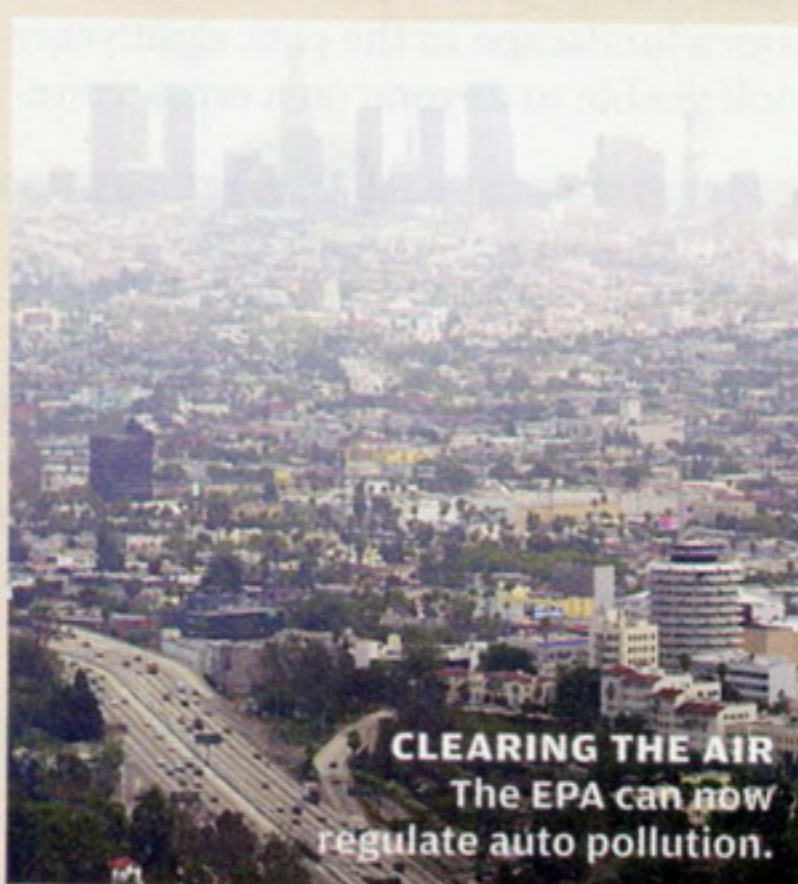
Denial is done. In a historic shift, the EPA ruled on March 20th that global warming poses a grave danger not only to the environment but also to public health – a finding that sets the stage for the agency to regulate planet-heating pollution under the Clean Air Act. "The days of inaction on climate change have ended," says Sen. Barbara Boxer, chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee. "Delay is over."

This is actually the second time that the EPA has sent an "endangerment finding" on climate change to the White House. In 2007, under a mandate from the Supreme Court to determine whether carbon emissions qualify as "pollutants," the agency delivered the exact same conclusion to the Bush White House. But the administration simply refused to open the e-mail attachment, enabling it to duck the issue for the remainder of Bush's term.

Environmental advocates say the new finding gives President Obama the ability to crack down on major producers of carbon dioxide. "The Chamber of Commerce is running around trying to scare the heck out of everybody, saying EPA is now going to try to regulate cow farts," says Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch. "Obviously the people at EPA are not stupid – they're going to target the biggest sources of global-warming pollution: motor vehicles and the electric-power companies."

In fact, the ruling may give Obama something even more valuable than a new regulatory tool. Rather than use the

Clean Air Act to curb climate change – a case-by-case process in which every new rule can be stymied by a lawsuit from corporate polluters – the president wants Congress to implement a cap-and-trade system that will lower overall emissions. "The finding gives Obama added leverage



in going to Congress," says O'Donnell. "He can say, 'I've got this authority in my back pocket. If you torpedo cap-and-trade, I'll have no choice but to deal with this administratively.'"

Senate Democrats will likely use the finding to prevent Republicans from using a filibuster to forestall climate regulation. "If Congress does nothing," Boxer warns her GOP opponents, "we will be watching EPA do our job."

T.D.



Speaker in Chief

As George W. Bush joins the ranks of ex-presidents on the lecture circuit, we offer an annotated look at the website that's promoting the wealth of experience he brings to the podium By Tim Dickinson

Washington Speakers Bureau, which bills itself as offering "Inspiration From the **World's Greatest Minds**," also represents Greg Gumbel, Kyle Petty and Durwood Fincher, "America's Funniest Surprise Speaker."

Bush requires either a **private jet** or first-class accommodations for four.

Bush, who said in 2007 he planned to make "ridiculous" money on the lecture circuit, is asking **\$150,000** a speech. That's about the same as his dad, but \$50,000 less than Dr. Phil.

The provocative billing for Bush's **first speech**, in Alberta, Canada: "A Conversation With George W. Bush."

Spent less than six years in the Oval Office. Was **on vacation** for more than two years at Crawford and Camp David - a presidential record.

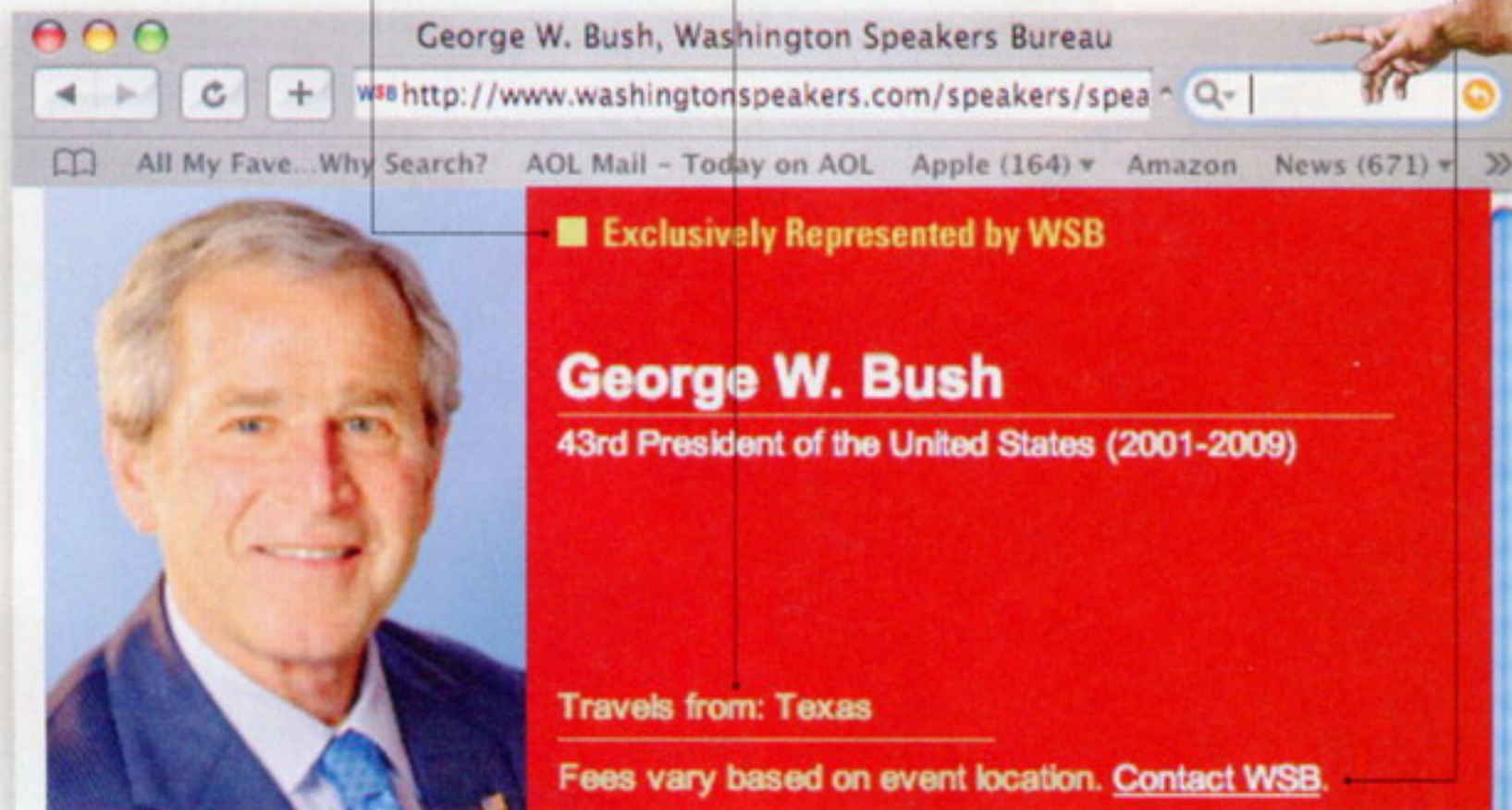


The International Red Cross termed Bush's approved treatment of terror suspects "torture" - a **war crime**.

Liberated 95,000 Iraqis and 10,000 Afghans **from their lives**.

Failed to fund **No Child Left Behind**; one in five schools can't meet standards.

Under Bush, Chinese holdings of U.S. debt soared to \$727 billion - a jump of **1,100 percent**.



Speech Topic

About George W. Bush

President during a momentous period in American history, George W. Bush offers his thoughts on **eight years** in the Oval Office, the challenges facing our nation in the 21st century, the power of freedom, the role of **faith**, and other pressing issues.

President George W. Bush served in the Oval Office for eight of the most consequential years in American history. Faced with challenges from a terrorist attack to a global financial crisis, he made difficult decisions that will shape the nation's course and world affairs for **decades to come**. His leadership after the terrorist attacks of **September 11, 2001**, was an inspiration to millions of Americans. His policies, while **controversial** at times, **kept the country safe** for more than seven years and **liberated** more than 50 million people from tyranny. Working with leaders in Congress and elsewhere, President Bush also raised standards and accountability in **public education**, added a prescription drug benefit to **Medicare** that helped more than 40 million beneficiaries, **improved air quality** and made America's energy supply more secure, designated more **ocean area habitats** for environmental protection than any predecessor, launched historic efforts to fight **HIV/AIDS** and malaria in Africa, and strengthened America's relationships with strategically important nations like India, **China** and Japan. He shares with audiences candid insights on his eight years in the White House, his experiences with other **world leaders**, the nature of public leadership and **decision making**, and a wide variety of domestic and international issues.

Bush explained his process in 2006: "I'm **the decider**, and I decide what is best."

True, actually.



With German Chancellor Angela Merkel

Required a third of HIV-prevention funding for Africa be distributed to **abstinence-only** groups.



"I'm driven with a **mission from God**. God would tell me, 'George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan.' And I did, and then God would tell me, 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq,' and I did."

Cost of Iraq War: **\$3 trillion**. Wealth lost in global meltdown: **\$11 trillion**.



To keep country safe from tyranny, Bush gave himself **tyrannical power** to suspend the First and Fourth Amendments.

Made it illegal for government to negotiate lower Rx prices, costing taxpayers an extra **\$60 billion**.

Annual carbon emissions soared by **230 million metric tons**.





Lil Wayne Planes Wayne

ONE NIGHT IN MARCH, AN ELEVATOR OPENS ONTO THE 23rd floor of a midtown Atlanta skyscraper, and Lil Wayne steps into the alcove of his luxury condominium. His place takes up the entire floor of the building. Still, to enter the apartment proper, Wayne must affix a digit to a biometric fingerprint scanner, which unlocks his door with a satisfying pop. Inside, massive windows offer breathtaking panoramic views of the city. Perhaps to avoid competing with such vistas, the decor in the apartment is tastefully minimalist. A series of black-and-white photographs of rural life in Venezuela line two white walls. Various African statues perch on a row of pillars, and a beaded South African bridal apron hangs in one of the bathrooms. (I know it's a South African bridal apron because little museum-style plaques hang beside all of the art.) A chef in a double-breasted chef's jacket, standing at attention behind a sprawling kitchen counter, quickly pours Wayne a tall glass of grape juice. At the end of the counter, there's a giant bowl filled with individual-size bags of potato chips and cookies.

Tonight, Wayne is wearing bright-red Vans sneakers, low-slung black denim pants, a white Polo T-shirt and large plastic-framed glasses. His thick dreadlocks are pulled back and hanging down to about mid-shoulder-blade. There's something Clark Kent-ish about the glasses, like he's trying to disguise himself, or somehow signal "off duty" with this single bookish touch. He grabs a remote and flicks on a flatscreen television – the ACC college-basketball tournament is taking place at the Georgia Dome this weekend,

Inside the hermetically sealed, perpetually stoned, compulsively improvised bubble around the world's most endearing gangsta

By Mark Binelli
Photographs by Peter Yang

and Wayne is a fanatical sports fan. His love extends to hockey, race-car driving, even golf. "Tiger might lose to Phil Mickelson," he informs me. "Nigga been number one since 2005!" In September, he started blogging for ESPN's website. Well, "blogging" – he's interviewed once a week by a staffer who turns his (often very funny) observations into posts. Wayne, e.g., on Shaq: "You can't underestimate [his] size. That's like a gorilla getting mad and actually deciding to go crazy. He's not an old man, he's an old gorilla. And I say that with love, but you can't treat him like a man." Wayne says his people actually approached ESPN two years ago. "They never responded," he says. "But now they did."

This evening, the city is shrouded in a cinematic fog, and from the window, the buildings fall away into the night, seeming as distant as another galaxy. "Amazing view," I say. Wayne continues to stare at the

I realize this must be his default means of mock-polite address when dealing with any square-seeming white journalists.)

Despite such a gratuitous level of productivity, Wayne remains one of the wittiest, most nimble rappers working today, with a hoarse delivery that sounds as if he's spent the past six months freebasing Vicks VapoRub and a penchant for surrealism informed by his actual drugs of choice: marijuana and prescription cough syrup. (The surrealism is epitomized by the 2007 mixtape track "I Feel Like Dying," in which Wayne imagines playing basketball with the moon and diving into a sea of codeine; it's basically the "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" of syrup paeans.) By my calculations, you'd have to go all the way back to *Thriller* to find another top-selling album of the year made by someone as flat-out eccentric as Wayne. On record, he often refers to himself as a Martian or a monster

rarity. My niche, that you're going to sell for me, is that he's the talentedest nigga ever. It's not my face, not what I wear. You're going to sell that this nigga is great every time. Every song that comes through for clearance, you clear that motherfucker. Every mixtape you hear about, you shut up. When it's time to drop, watch what happens." *Tha Carter III* sold a million copies in its first week.

"I used to tell Cortez," Wayne says, "my work ethic is going to sell me. Nobody ain't doing what I've done. People will have to recognize that."

It's Wayne's moment, for sure. He's touring arenas, *Tha Carter III* is still lodged in *Billboard*'s Top 40, he remains a ubiquitous presence on radio and online. After spending years declaring himself "the greatest rapper alive," Wayne has indisputably fulfilled his own prophecy – and so, in typical Wayne fashion, his next move is one

"To be the best, you have to smell like the best, dress like the best. Michael Jordan, John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Frank Sinatra – I study those people."

game. Then, registering my comment, he glances over and grins, half-modest, half-embarrassed at how little it takes to impress me, as if I've just complimented his stockpile of Doritos. "It's just *Atlanta*," he says.

Lil Wayne is one of the most popular – and prolific – recording artists in the world. He got his start at 15, as the youngest member of the New Orleans hip-hop group the Hot Boys. He's 26 now, and last year he released his sixth studio album, *Tha Carter III*. It was the bestselling album of 2008. The same year, he was the featured attraction on several mixtapes – most notably DJ Drama's *Dedication 3* and the Empire's excellent *The Drought Is Over, Part 6* – and made guest appearances on a staggering 110 tracks by other artists, according to the fan website Lil Wayne HQ. He rarely skips a night in the studio, often working until dawn, and show-stealing performances at the VMAs and the Grammys brought him even more mainstream attention – including a hilarious prime-time interview with Katie Couric. When the CBS anchor asked him about his well-documented love of weed, Wayne said, "I'm a rapper. That's who I am, Miss Katie. And I am a gangsta. And I do what I want," a sound bite he's since sampled for an as-yet-unreleased new track. (I'm feeling superior about the Couric exchange until, during our time together, Wayne begins calling me "Mr. Mark," and

– meaning he's so prodigiously talented he's not quite human – and over the years, he's embraced body modification so enthusiastically, he seems intent on making himself look as post-human as he sounds. His teeth gleam diamonds, and a metal stud pierces his lip, and he's nearly covered, head to toe, all five-feet-six of him, in tattoos. And, of course, there's his recent excessive use of the Auto-Tune program on his warbled vocals, which began with last year's hit "Lollipop" and has the effect of making him *sound* like a cyborg – albeit a very stoned one.

Wayne's records have been going gold and platinum since his 1999 solo debut, *Tha Block Is Hot*, released when he was only 17. Still, as he moved into his 20s, Wayne was hardly a household name, and he began to feel as if his record label wasn't doing all it could to promote his music. So he came up with a plan of his own – in a blatant violation of the economic law of scarcity, he began working nonstop, recording and releasing countless mixtape tracks, generally available for free on the Internet. "The label was in my ear," recalls Wayne's manager and best friend, Cortez Bryant. "'Please, Tez, stop him! He can't be on all those songs.' He sat us down and told us all, 'I know what I'm doing.'"

"I gave them one little message," Wayne says. "I said, 'You never assign motherfuckers to my project. You're not going to treat me like your biggest artist, I must sell myself. If every artist has a thing, my thing is going to be my fucking talent. That's the

of the craziest in recent pop-music history: He has decided to record a rock album. *Rebirth*, which will feature Wayne singing, via Auto-Tune, over thrashy, emo-inflected riffs – some played by Wayne himself – is due out in June. It's not clear yet whether this latest artistic transformation will go down as a disastrous act of hubris or another brilliant career move that broadens the definition of what's allowed in hip-hop. The first single, "Prom Queen," with a video featuring members of Korn, unfortunately points to the former path. That said, Wayne looks awfully cool onscreen, flailing his hair like he's fronting a Soundgarden cover band, and there's certainly a young-rock-star void to be filled at a moment when the prospect of a Blink-182 reunion passes for exciting.

When I tell Wayne the rock album makes me think of Michael Jordan deciding he wanted to play baseball, he ignores the negative connotation of the comment – the fact that Jordan was thoroughly mediocre at baseball and transformed himself, overnight, from dignified retired sports icon to national punch line – and instead chooses to focus on the fact that he's just been compared to Michael Jordan. "You have to know I'm glad you say that," Wayne says, looking me in the eyes and seeming touched. "I always believe that to be the best, you have to smell like the best, dress like the best, act like the best. When you throw your trash in the garbage can, it has to be better than anybody else who

Contributing editor MARK BINELLI wrote "Motor City Breakdown" in RS 1073.



ROLLING SOLO
Wayne on his tour bus, where he has a full recording studio. "The studio is his lifeline," says a friend. "When he can't go into the studio, he gets edgy."

ever threw trash in the garbage can. Michael Jordan is that type of person. Tiger Woods. Roger Federer. Muhammad Ali. Malcolm X. Martin Luther King. Obama. Frank Sinatra. John Kennedy. Basquiat. I study those people. What the hell did they do to be so great?"

And the answer? "They were just them. I shouldn't have said Muhammad Ali. I didn't mean to say somebody like that. All those other people, when you tell them they're the greatest, they act two ways – they either say, 'No, I'm not,' or they say – here, he assumes a humble voice – 'I know. Thanks.' That's because they are. Plainly, they are."

AL I'S DISQUALIFICATION ON grounds of braggadocio apparently does not apply to Wayne, who recorded a song called "Best Rapper Alive" for *Tha Carter II* and has expanded on the theme on tracks like "Best Thing Yet," "The Best in the Business," "They Still Like Me" and too many others to list. Still, like Ali in his heyday, Wayne actually is the best – at least since *Dedication 2*, the 2006 mixtape he recorded with DJ Drama, which arguably remains his strongest effort – and, as everyone knows, with great bestness comes great responsibility. Tonight, that includes a visit to a downtown Atlanta nightclub, where a local hip-hop label is holding a private showcase for Wayne in hopes that

he might sign one of their artists to his Young Money imprint.

The club is called the Ice Ultra Lounge. It adjoins a Cajun restaurant and is literally ice-themed: Prom-grade fake icicles dangle from the ceiling. Wayne is led to a red couch at the foot of the stage, where he leans back to watch the show, never removing his sunglasses. There are three performers: a bouncy R&B singer in the vein of Usher who, uncomfortably, does not receive a single clap as he jogs off-stage (Wayne's head remains perfectly still throughout the performance); a talented rapper sporting a mohawk, a bow tie and a red carnation, backed by a live band (think André 3000 fronting Body Count); and a sexy female trio operating in the Britney Spears/Pussycat Dolls "lip-syncing stripper" genre (their performance includes simulated lesbian cunnilingus and a metaphorical song called "Elevator.") Afterward, Wayne good-naturedly chit-chats with the performers, but when I ask him what he thought, he only comments on the rapper, who he quite liked.

Soon, he's ready to leave the club. Outside, his driver, who wears leather gloves and a chauffeur's cap, waits in his Rolls Royce Phantom. I follow in my rental car with E.I., Wayne's road manager, and Bless, his personal assistant. E.I., who is from New York and has been working for Wayne for about five years, has been advising me to put as much of my money as possible in gold, specifically telling me about a place on

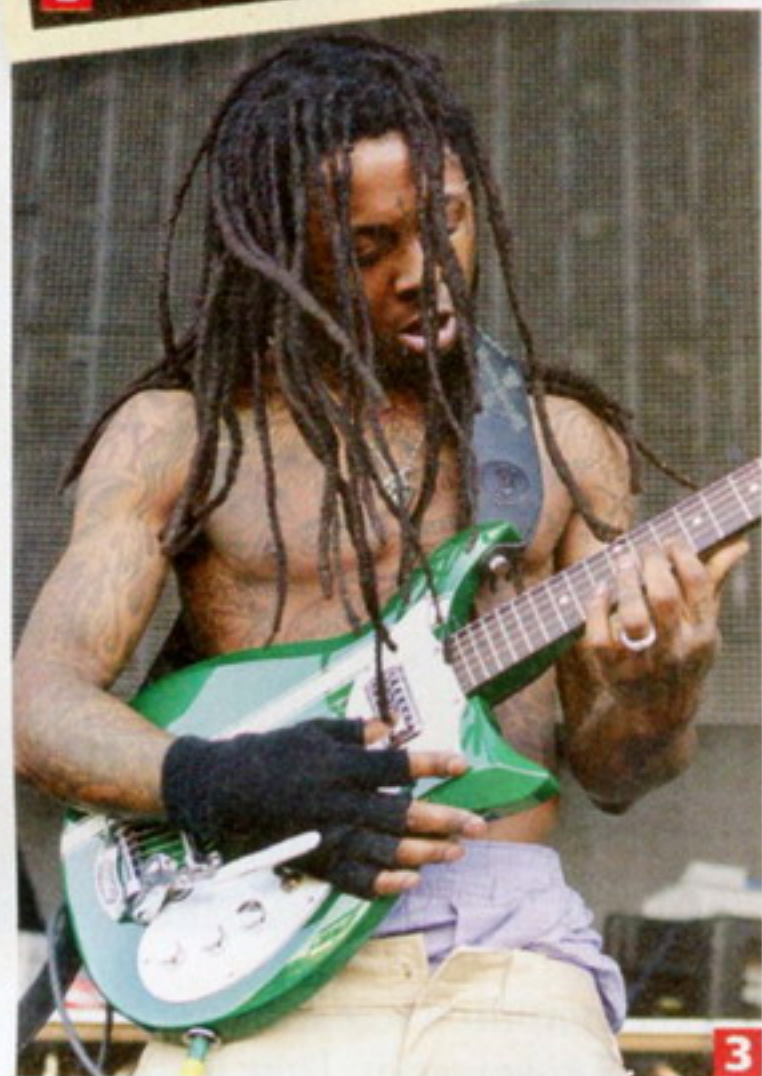
56th Street in midtown Manhattan where you can get Krugerrands. Now he turns to Bless and says of Wayne, with a mixture of admiration and amusement, "He got people doing everything for him. Driving his cars. Getting him drinks. Getting him bitches. He's a step away from people *breathing* for him. I cut that nigga's steak!"

Bless cracks up and says, "I thought you were joking, but when you looked at me like that, I said, 'Oh, shit – he's serious.'"

"You've really cut his steak?" I ask.

E.I. nods and says, "When he's in the studio, that's all he thinks of, is the music. He can't do anything else."

To helpfully illustrate the point, shortly after we arrive at the condo, Wayne struggles for about 30 seconds to remove an enormous diamond bracelet from his wrist. It's so big it looks like a prop handcuff specially designed for shackling a Houdini-like escape artist. After a few moments, another of his assistants rushes over and helps him unclasp the bracelet. He places it on a mantle along with other removed jewelry (a diamond-studded watch, several gold chains), and we retire to the TV room, where a home-theater screen takes up an entire wall. Hanging on another wall is a large abstract painting that's either been deeply inspired by Mark Rothko or is an actual Rothko. We settle onto a white leather sectional couch, and the chef places a melon plate on the glass table in front of us, next to a coffee-table book about Turkey. Wayne grabs a slice of cantaloupe



Wayne's World

Wayne started rapping at age eight. "Whenever anybody came to the house, it was showtime," he says. (1) In 1996, he played in his junior high band. Three years later, his debut for Cash Money Records went platinum. (2) With the Cash Money crew in 2000. From left: Baby, Turk, Mannie Fresh, Slim, B.G., Wayne and Juvenile. (3) At New Orleans' 2008 Voodoo Music fest.

**"If every artist has
My niche is**

and pulls a blunt from a packet of Swisher Sweets. (Assistants preroll Wayne's blunts for him and then return them to the packet.) Wayne smokes weed the way other people smoke cigarettes; he's got a blunt going pretty much every moment we're together, though he never offers to share.

The basketball game is playing on the giant television with the sound off. Wayne shifts his attention between the screen and the interview. He's sitting on the edge of the couch because of a pair of fresh tattoos on the backs of both thighs: Marilyn Monroe and a girl on a stripper pole. Inkwise, his body is approaching a circus-sideshow-tattooed-man level of saturation: I AM MUSIC over his right eye, TRIGGER along a finger, a dove on one of his biceps, BANG BANG across his chest, a flaming Cash Money logo taking up most of his gut, FEAR and GOD over either eyelid (though Wayne tells me he's never been religious), MISUNDERSTOOD curving along the left side of his face. When he speaks, he has the habit of tilting his head back and his chin forward, in the manner of short guys of time immemorial looking to project swagger. His speaking voice has the same lizardsy croak as his rapping voice. It sounds ancient, especially coming out of someone so young.

The rasp of his voice is the source of his other nickname, Weezy – or, more fully, Weezy F. Baby. His full proper name is

Dwayne Michael Carter Jr. He grew up in New Orleans' 17th Ward, in a neighborhood called Hollygrove, one of the poor, low-lying areas badly flooded during Hurricane Katrina. He never knew his biological father, Dwayne Sr.; his mother, Jacinda, was only 19 and not up for the responsibility of raising a child, so Wayne lived with his grandmother until he was 10. He always loved performing. "I was the only child," Wayne says, "so whenever anybody came to the house, it was showtime. I couldn't wait." He started rapping at eight. He liked the reactions he'd get from people when they'd hear unexpected things coming out of a little kid's mouth. "I used to know what I shouldn't be understanding," Wayne says, "so when I'd rap, adults would say, 'How did you know about that?'" Eventually, he met a rapper from the neighborhood named Lil Slim, who was putting out Southern gangsta-rap records with titles like *Thug'n & Pluggin* on a local label called Cash Money. Lil Slim eventually introduced Wayne to Cash Money's founders, the brothers Bryan "Baby" Williams and Ronald "Slim" (a different Slim) Williams, at a record signing. Wayne was 11, and he rapped for Baby on command. Baby was impressed that Wayne looked him directly in the eye, and he gave the kid a Cash Money business card. "I never stopped calling him," Wayne says.

"You can't listen to most New Orleans music and listen to mine and compare – they're so different," says Wayne. "But how New Orleans is in my music is, we have this drive about us. We have this motivation. You see people on the corner, singing, and that takes a different type of pride to do that. It takes a different type of pride to go on the corner and ask for money for Girl Scout Cookies. When we used to play on the little baseball team, you had to wash cars at the red light. It takes that kind of pride. I think that's why me, being 11, looking at this man who's intimidating the world, he tells me to rap, and I rap. He didn't ask me to tell him about who I am. I probably would have froze up. But music, rap music – I think that's where New Orleans comes in. We're relentless when it comes to music."

It turned out that Wayne's mother had gone to high school with the Williams brothers, which seems like it should have been an advantage, except she knew their gangster reputations. "When I came in and said, 'I'm thinking of being with Cash Money,' she said, 'Who?' I said, 'Baby and. . .'" She said, 'Bryan Williams. Oh, no.' She was totally against it." Still, she allowed him to do odd jobs around the label office, until his grades began to suffer. "Her punishment," Wayne says, "was, 'You're not gonna be with them no more.'" It probably didn't help that, around this same time,

Wayne accidentally shot himself in the chest while playing with a handgun. He's told different versions of the event, but all involve childish clowning around: In one, he was stoned and reaching for a bag of cookies, in another, imitating Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver* in a bedroom mirror.

To win back his mother's trust, Wayne threw himself into school. "I wasn't the type of kid to be like, 'I'm going to be distraught because I can't rap,'" Wayne says. "My mom said, 'You're going to do school and love school,' and that's what I did. I'm smart as fuck. I started bringing home shit she never did." Last year, his former drama teacher told New Orleans' *Times-Picayune*: "[Wayne] didn't always behave, but as far as an actor, you couldn't ask for anything better. . . . He was very talented. He was very committed to his character."

"He was about 12, and I was about 15 when we met," recalls manager Bryant, a thin, preppy guy who wears cardigan sweaters and glasses with red plastic frames. "It was right after he'd shot himself, and his mother had pulled him away from rap. I was involved with a lot of things in high school, so that's how I got to know him." Wayne says Bryant was "like a college high school student. You know that type? The 11th or 12th

was putting down, because he wasn't my real dad. He was like, 'Shit, nigga, if this shit don't work, I need my \$700 back.'"

SO FAR, WAYNE HAS RECORDED about 50 possible songs for *Rebirth*. He's not finished yet, but he's given this generous first batch to Bryant, who will choose the final track listing and who has been listening to the songs obsessively, just as he did with the glut of material for *Tha Carter III*. Wayne's other major project at the moment is promoting his nine-member Young Money crew, which will release its own debut around the same time as *Rebirth*. *Vibe* magazine recently ran a blog post on Young Money with the headline "Lil Wayne's Crew Not That Gangsta." And it's true: The group includes two teenagers who look like little kids (13-year-old Lil Chuckee and 16-year-old Lil Twist), two scantily dressed women (Shanell and Nicki Minaj) and Drake Graham, who is from Canada (where "not that gangsta" might actually be written on the flag in Latin) and who is best known for playing a physically disabled student on the hit tween soap opera *Degrassi: The Next Generation*.

comments on 50's most recent beef – mocking Miami rapper Rick Ross for working as a prison guard before he became a rapper. "People be mad at Rick Ross because he had a job," Wayne snorts, shaking his head. "Like, 'Ha ha, you had a job before you had a job, nigga!' Stupid shit."

Other than an unpaid stint at a summer camp, Wayne has never held a day job in his life, a fact that pleases him. In high school, Bryant would always tell Wayne to forget about rap and think about college. "I saw it as risky," says Bryant, who has a mass communications degree from Jackson State University. "His main thing," Wayne adds, "was that I was 14, and the Cash Money guys were grown men. 'Wayne, they're not serious about you. You're a child. They're not changing your life or your mom's life. You're not making money.'"

By the latter half of the Nineties, though, Cash Money blew up, with the rest of the country suddenly digging its distinctly regional flavor – the Louisiana drawl of rappers like Juvenile and the infectious Southern bounce of Mannie Fresh's primitive Space Invaders beats. Wayne dropped out of high school to be a member of the Hot Boys, the label's supergroup. On Juvenile's hit "Back That Azz Up," it's Wayne who

**a thing, my thing is my talent. That's the rarity.
that I'm the talentedest n***a ever."**

grader that's already acting like he's in his second year of college, coming to school in slippers, like he lives in a dorm room. The girls loved that shit – girls always want to mess with someone who acts older. So he was kind of the shit at school."

Wayne also became a bit of a nerdy overachiever, playing a munchkin in a high school theater production of *The Wiz* (YouTube it) and cymbals in the band and full-back on the football team (he was small but aggressive). He was always small for his age, but other students never picked on him. "I always ran with some badass kids," Wayne says. (Cortez, presumably, aside.) "We were all small, but we'd bust your ass. We were called MM – the Midget Mafia."

Meanwhile, the New Orleans underground hip-hop scene was beginning to blow up. Master P and his self-financed No Limit label had just signed a huge deal with Priority Records after a series of regional hits, and other labels were beginning to look for local talent. Wayne's stepfather, Reginald "Rabbit" McDonald – whom Wayne describes as a drug dealer on one of his mixtapes – paid \$700 to have Mannie Fresh, Cash Money's in-house producer, record a demo for Wayne; at the time, Cash Money was a year away from breaking out of local notoriety and signing its own lucrative deal with Universal. "That was big money back then," Wayne says. "That nigga

Another member of Young Money, Gudda Gudda, sits on a black leather couch. OK, he looks gangsta. The letters S-H-I-T are tattooed on the fingers of his left hand and a spiderweb tattoo covers his elbow. Gudda is from New Orleans' Ninth Ward; he and Wayne met when they were teenagers. "He was best friends with one of my homies, and so we started gambling together, shooting dice a lot," Gudda says. Wayne was 16 by that point and had already started making hit records with Cash Money. "We all knew who he was," Gudda says. "I remember he'd come through the neighborhood in his little cars. At that time, I was strictly hustling. One day, Wayne said, 'You been through a lot. You should write that on paper.' It was like a Daniel-san/Mr. Miyagi type thing. He showed me how to pattern verses, cut out certain words, just get straight to the point."

One afternoon, I meet Wayne at a warehouse space in an industrial neighborhood in Atlanta where he's overseeing a photo shoot for the Young Money album. He's wearing a black Adidas tracksuit with white stripes and quietly ashing a blunt into an empty bottle of Vitamin Water. Last year, on the mixtape track "Louisianimal," he taunted the rapper 50 Cent with the lines "All about a dollar, fuck two quarters/Bitch, I'll pour syrup in that Vitamin Water." (50 has his own flavor of Vitamin Water.) Later, he

cackles, "Drop it like it's hot!" He can also take some credit for popularizing the term "bling," having delivered the unforgettable hook on B.G.'s "Bling Bling," Cash Money's signature hit. In the hilarious, low-budget video, Wayne and the thuggish-looking Cash Money crew toss handfuls of cash in the air, while Mannie Fresh boasts about his "plane" after emerging from a helicopter. (Another great thing about Cash Money: their weird helicopter obsession.) A spazzy Wayne, coming off like Chris Tucker playing a gangbanger, displays a talent for stealing the show even back then. In his verse, he raps, "I pull up in the Expedition/They be like, 'No no no no nuh-o he di-int,'" then chuckles in a way that lets you know the entire song is a big joke.

"Them niggas is gangstas," Wayne says today of his Cash Money colleagues. "They taught me how to handle life. These were a whole bunch of guys, everyone had been in penitentiary, and I ain't talking about for fights – I mean for years. But it was the best upbringing a kid could get, because it's reality on your plate, eat it or not." Wayne remains close to the Cash Money crew: He's still signed to the label, where he briefly served as president. In 2006, he released an album called *Like Father, Like Son* with Baby Williams, who now records as Birdman. There's also been talk of a possible Hot Boys reunion. [Cont. on 73]





CLOSE-UP

Asher Roth's Nonstop Party

I FEEL GOOD," SAYS

Asher Roth. It's 2 a.m., and he's lurching out of a Panama City, Florida, club, where he has downed many Miller Lites and vodka shots, and made out with a mousy brunette. "We'll see how I feel in the morning." When he wakes up six hours later, Roth will puke. He'll then go on to get drunk that night at another bar and hook up with an attractive University of Pittsburgh undergrad. (He decides not to sleep with her, because she has fake breasts.)

Roth, 23, doesn't seem to need a reason to celebrate, but this week he's got one: He's here to perform at mtvU's *Spring Break*, thanks to his Top 20 hit, "I Love College" – an easy-grooving ode to wild campus parties, beer pong and random hookups. Based on the chords to Weezer's "Say It Ain't So," the single – like much of Roth's debut, *Asleep in the Bread Aisle* (due April 20th) – doesn't resemble anything on the hip-hop charts. "I absolutely rep the suburbs," says Roth, who grew up near Philadelphia, in Morrisville, Pennsylvania (population 9,645).

Inspired by radio-friendly Nineties rap hits like Jay-Z's *Vol. 2 . . . Hard Knock Life*, Roth began rhyming with friends in his teens. Buoyed by positive feedback for his homemade CDs, Roth kept at it while studying at Pennsylvania's West Chester University. (He dropped out after being signed.) It was after reminiscing with a West Chester buddy one night that Roth wrote "I Love College." Now he worries the hit makes him seem too pop. "It might be the worst song on my CD," Roth says.

When he performs the track at the mtvU gig in front of hundreds of well-lubricated revelers on the beach, the crowd sings along. "This is the life!" Roth gushes, as he comes offstage. Walking back to his rental condo takes ages, as he's besieged by girls who want to take a picture – and then make out. A group of guys chants a line from his hit – "Do something crazy!" – as he walks by.

When not partying, Roth is actually kind of a spacey stoner, ruminating about politics, yoga (he practices it often) and how he wants respect from hardcore hip-hop fans. "There's something for everybody in my music," he says. "I'm like an iPod on shuffle."

CHRISTIAN HOARD

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS STANFORD

SPRING BREAKIN'
Roth (bottom) in Panama City, Florida, in March. "I absolutely rep the suburbs," he says.



A photograph of a dense forest floor. In the foreground, there are large, moss-covered logs and various green ferns and plants. In the background, tall, slender tree trunks rise up towards a blue sky, with some sunlight filtering through the canopy.

The LAST OUTLAW POET

Kris Kristofferson's
all-American journey has
taken him from the Army
Rangers to Nashville to
Hollywood – with a few stops
in the gutter along the way

BY ETHAN HAWKE

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID LACHAPELLE

STANDING BACKSTAGE AT THE BEACON Theatre in New York, leaning against a crumbling brick wall in the dark, I could barely see Kris Kristofferson standing to my left. Willie Nelson was in the shadows to my right. Ray Charles was standing beside Willie, idly shifting his weight back and forth. A bit farther along the wall were Elvis Costello, Wyclef Jean, Norah Jones, Shelby Lynne, Paul Simon and respective managers, friends and family. Everybody was nervous and tight. We were there for Willie Nelson's 70th birthday concert in 2003.

Up from the basement came one of country music's brightest stars (who shall remain nameless). At that moment in time, the Star had a monster radio hit about bombing America's enemies back into the Stone Age.

"Happy birthday," the Star said to Willie, breezing by us. As he passed Kristofferson in one long, confident stride, out of the corner of his mouth came "None of that lefty shit out there tonight, Kris."

"What the fuck did you just say to me?" Kris growled, stepping forward.

"Oh, no," groaned Willie under his breath. "Don't get Kris all riled up."

"You heard me," the Star said, walking away in the darkness.

"Don't turn your back to me, boy," Kristofferson shouted, not giving a shit that basically the entire music industry seemed to be flanking him.

The Star turned around: "I don't want any problems, Kris - I just want you to tone it down."

"You ever worn your country's uniform?" Kris asked rhetorically.

"What?"

"Don't 'What?' me, boy! You heard the question. You just don't like the answer." He paused just long enough to get a full chest of air. "I asked, 'Have you ever served your country?' The answer is, no, you have not. Have you ever killed another man? Huh? Have you ever taken another man's life and then cashed the check your country gave you for doing it? No, you have not. So shut the fuck up!" I could feel his body pulsing with anger next to me. "You don't know what the hell you are talking about!"

"Whatever," the young Star muttered.

Ray Charles stood motionless. Willie Nelson looked at me and shrugged mischievously like a kid in the back of the classroom.

Kristofferson took a deep inhale and leaned against the wall, still vibrating with

adrenaline. He looked over at Willie as if to say, "Don't say a word." Then his eyes found me.

"You know what Waylon Jennings said about guys like him?" he whispered.

I shook my head.

"They're doin' to country music what pantyhose did to finger-fuckin'."

* * *

*Am I young enough
to believe in revolution?
Am I strong enough
to get down on my knees and pray?
Am I high enough
on the chain of evolution
To respect myself
and my brother and my sister
And perfect myself
in my own peculiar way?
—"Pilgrim's Progress"*

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON IS CUT FROM A thicker, more intricate cloth than most celebrities today: Imagine if Brad Pitt had also written a Number One single for someone like Amy Winehouse, was considered among the finest songwriters of his generation, had been a Rhodes scholar, a U.S. Army Airborne Ranger, a boxer, a professional helicopter pilot - and was as politically outspoken as Sean Penn. That's what a motherfuckin' badass Kris Kristofferson was in 1979. And now if you go online and watch the video for his 2006 song "In the News," it's obvious he is still very much that man.

The son of an Air Force general, Kris walked to grade school barefoot in Brownsville, Texas. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Pomona College, studied William Blake and Shakespeare at Oxford, became a U.S. Army captain, was assigned to teach literature at West Point and then abruptly dropped out of the Army to become a songwriter.

Forty years later, Kristofferson is a unique figure in the history of American music and cinema. The late Sixties and the Seventies saw a creative explosion for American artists. Cinema and rock &



THE LONE STAR

Kristofferson in 1981, the year after *Heaven's Gate* tanked. "What is even more difficult than failure," he says, "is when you are perceived as a 'success' and you are failing."

roll were in a full-blown renaissance, and Kristofferson stood dead center in both revolutions. He wrote a Number One hit single for Janis Joplin, played at Jimi Hendrix's last concert, appeared on *The Johnny Cash Show* with other "new discoveries" like Neil Young, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor, won three Grammy Awards, starred in films directed by the likes of Martin Scorsese, Paul Mazursky and Sam Peckinpah, and became one of the hottest male actors in the U.S. after appearing in *A Star Is Born*.

Then he played the lead in one of the largest commercial failures in film history, *Heaven's Gate*. Kris took the bullet and was shunned from the mainstream, disappearing back into the counterculture.

ETHAN HAWKE has been nominated for Academy Awards for both his acting and his writing. His novel "Ash Wednesday" was excerpted in RS 899/900.



Today, Kris' songs have been recorded by more than 500 artists, and he has acted in more than 70 films. In 2006, at the age of 69, he released what is perhaps his finest album, *This Old Road*. I had been at Willie Nelson's 70th birthday concert to introduce Kristofferson, whom I had directed in the movie *Chelsea Walls* in 1999. After both of those experiences, I was enthralled by this man who had lived through so much success and so much failure, both personal and professional, and who had survived with his dignity intact, if not actually heightened. *This Old Road* motivated me to pitch Kris the idea of my making a documentary about him.

"With all that's happening in the world today, why would you want to make a film

about me?" he asked over the phone. "Let me take you around to a few places I know, and we'll find some real subject matter."

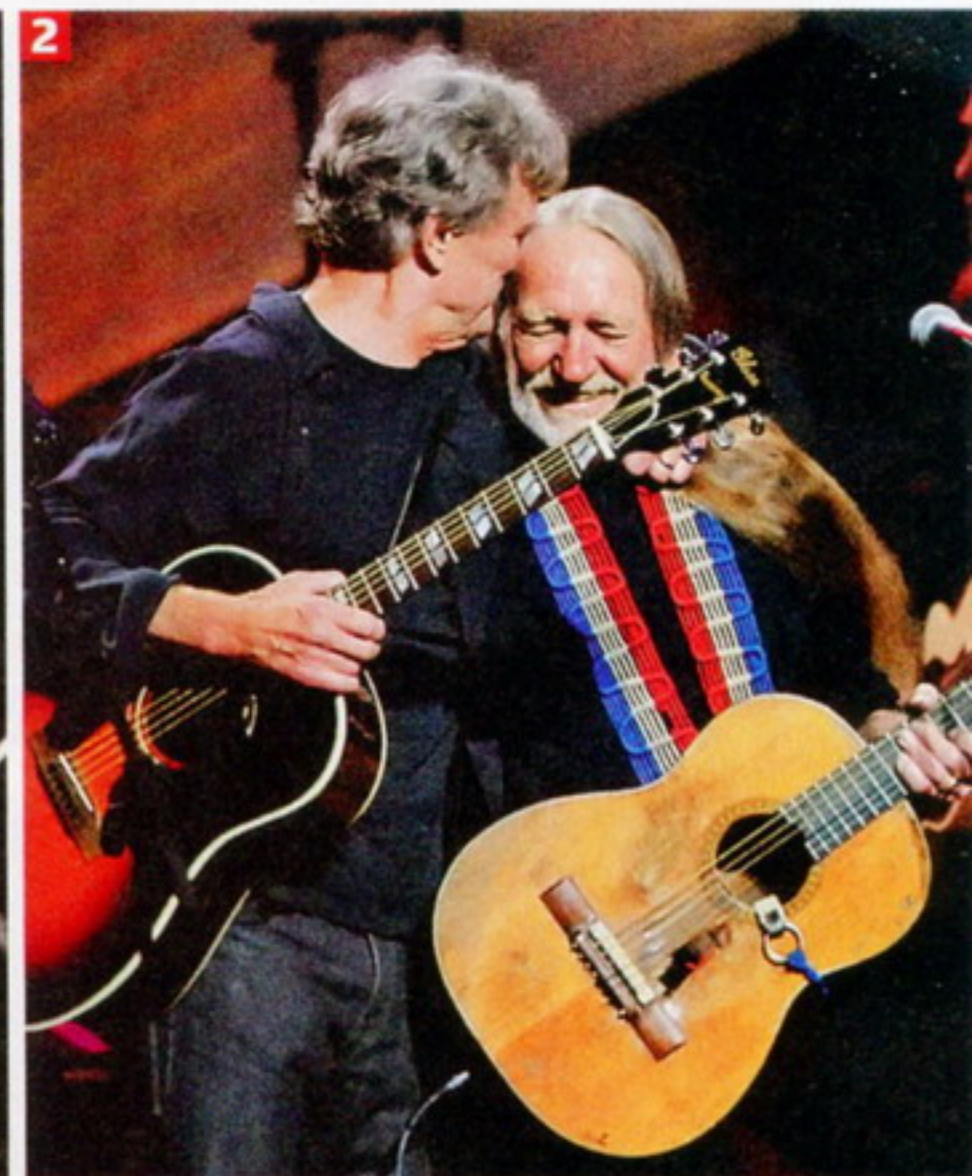
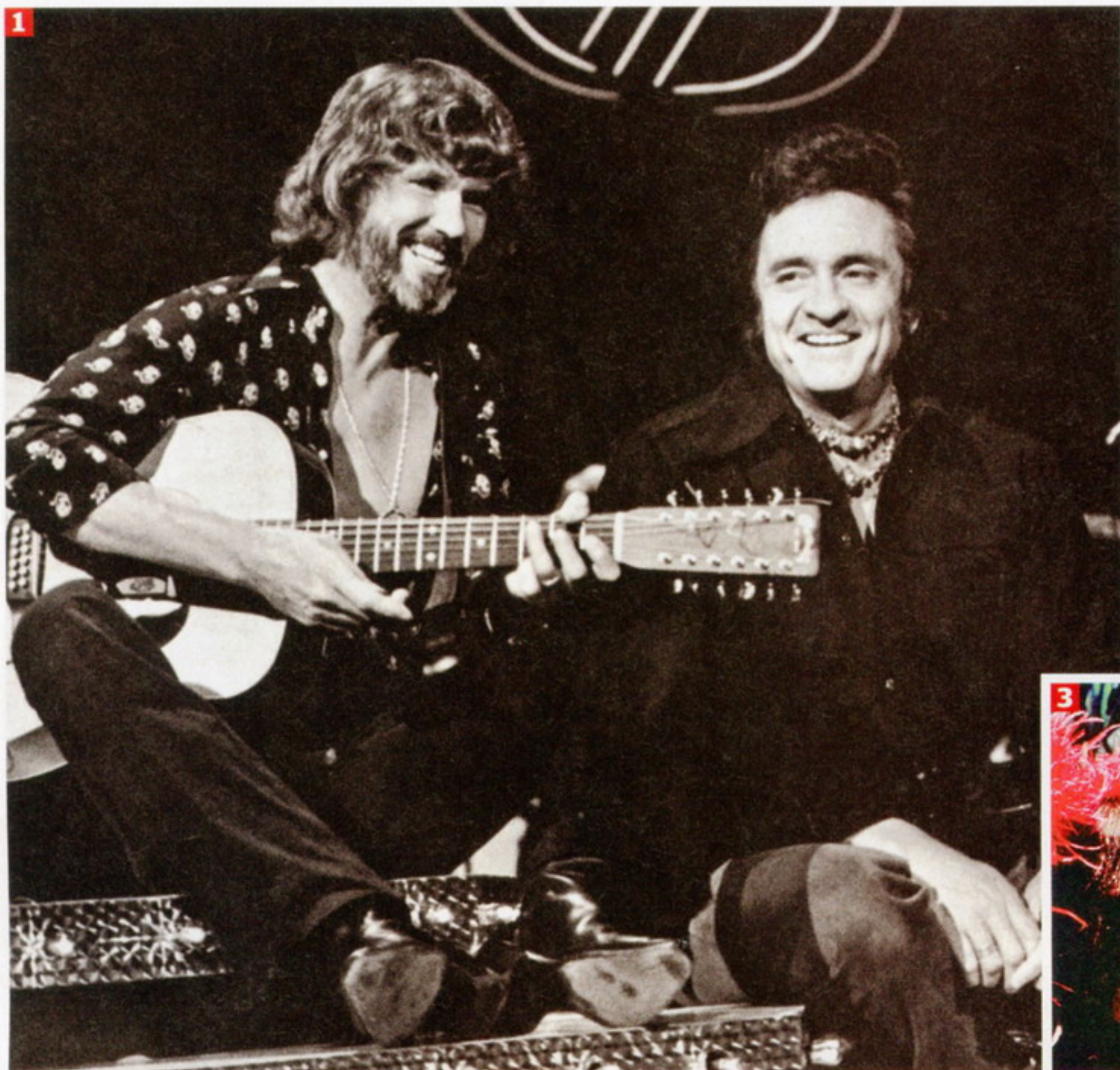
I told him that I was aware the world was full of suffering but that I had just seen an old documentary about Woody Guthrie and I was damn glad someone made it.

"Yeah, I'd like to see that," he said, grudgingly. "It's just that whole hero-worship thing that bugs me. The cult of personality, you know?"

I explained that I was born in Austin, Texas, in 1970, to a 20-year-old father who did, and still does, a killer cover of "Me and Bobby McGee." My dad plays the song slower than Janis Joplin did. He pores over the lyrics, enjoying each

rhyme, his voice heavy with that song's melancholy sense of loss. "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," my dad will repeat, and then often add, "That may be the best song ever written." One Sunday morning, we skipped church to go see an early showing of the film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. For me, Kris has always been a part of the landscape of my country—an amalgamation of John Wayne and Walt Whitman.

As an artist who has tried more than one genre from time to time, I told Kris I felt I had a lot to learn from him, and that I didn't want to let the opportunity slip away. Eventually we agreed on a compromise: an in-depth interview about his life and work.



* * *

*I've just got to wonder what my
daddy would've done
If he'd seen the way they turned his
dream around
I've got to go by what he told me
Try to tell the truth and
stand your ground
Don't let the bastards get you down.*

—“Don't Let the Bastards Get You Down”

IT'S AN AWKWARD THING TO INVITE your hero to your house. Early in September 2008, Kris, 72, is seated on my red couch in his black jeans, gray T-shirt and a pair of ancient cowboy boots. As a music fan, I had dreamed of the encounter, but the unforeseen interloper is my own need to express myself, asking questions quickly and then just as rapidly answering them. Periodically, I let him speak.

“What does it feel like to survive a lifetime in the arts with your integrity intact? Why does masculine energy so often manifest itself as idiocy? Why is male sensitivity so often linked with perceived weakness?” I continue, “How do I talk about my beliefs about the war to my brother who just returned home from his second tour in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, when in truth I admire him so much and am actually envious of the courage of his convictions? How do you enjoy your life and at the same time stay responsible to all those who don't have enough to eat? Who are your heroes?” For

a moment, I wait for an answer, then decide to plow forward. “I mean, what happened to the great Southern-progressive Democrat? My grandfather helped kick the Ku Klux Klan out of West Texas.” I tell him this as if he's interviewing me. “What did LBJ mean when he signed the Civil Rights Act saying, ‘I just lost the South for the Democratic Party for the next 50 years?’ Where are the voices like his? How does one be, as Johnny Cash said, ‘a dove with claws?’”

Kris just kind of laughs. I expect him to say, “I agreed to be interviewed, not to be your goddamn guru!” But he doesn't. He takes a long beat, then says, “Yeah, that used to piss Shel Silverstein off.”

“What did?” I ask.

“That whole ‘dove with claws’ thing. He just thought, ‘What the hell is that?’” Kris smiles. He has an easy way about him, slow to speak and gentle in his movements.

“Why do you think Cash said it?”

“I think he was feeling the very thing that you're talking about – that if people think you are against the war, that in some way you're a pussy.”

“Your first recorded song was a pro-Vietnam War song, right?”

“Yeah, I wrote it when I was in the Army on my way to Nashville, and I came upon a protest march. I had a lot of friends over there, and I was thinking we were fighting for freedom. And I wasn't thinking very deeply.”

“Why did you end up changing your mind about that war?”

“I was flying helicopters in the Gulf of Mexico on one of those offshore oil rigs, and I was talking to some guys coming home. The stories they were telling me were so horrible that I think it just shocked me enough to change my thinking 180 degrees. I'm talking about things like this young vet telling me about taking people up in a helicopter and interrogating them and if they didn't say what they were supposed to, they'd throw them out, stomping on the fingers of the prisoner holding on to the skids, you know? The guy telling me this particular story was still just a green kid when he returned from the war. The notion that you could make a young person do something so inhuman to another soldier – or even worse, a civilian – convinced me that we were in the wrong. I hadn't been thinking in human terms of what that military action was.” He pauses, stroking my dog. “I agree with you totally about all the conditioning that makes us want to feel masculine and tough. I mean, I'm sure that's why I went to Ranger School and Jump School. And I'm proud of that Ranger tab – still am. But the notion of bombing a defenseless country that's never threatened us and the fact we all accepted it and said, ‘That's politics!’ Damn. I'm not really interested in politics. We've come to a place that I never dreamed and I know my father never dreamed that America would get to.”



The Highwayman

For years, Kristofferson was a struggling songwriter in Nashville before Johnny Cash covered "Sunday Morning Coming Down." (1) With Cash on *Johnny Cash and Friends* in 1976. (2) At Willie Nelson's 70th birthday concert in New York, 2003. (3) With Janis Joplin in 1970 – she turned his song "Me and Bobby McGee" into a Number One hit. (4) Kris, here in 1970, started performing at the Troubadour in Los Angeles that year, where he drew raves for his unique brand of country. (5) With Neil Young at 1990's Farm Aid concert.

"That's why Shel didn't like that 'dove with claws' thing," Kris goes on.

"He should have just said he was a dove and proud of it?"

"Exactly. 'Cause people would have accepted anything from John," says Kris. "We knew he was a man. I don't really think anybody would have called Johnny Cash a pussy. But John was conditioned, just like you and me. You really have to get past all of that – where you have enough feeling about what's right and wrong in the world to not give a shit about what kind of names anybody throws at you.

"Also, I had the benefit of an education," Kris adds. "After college I got to go to Oxford. Given that, I should've been a lot smarter than I was, but even still I volunteered for Vietnam. Christ, I should have known better, so I can't really be critical of individuals. Ultimately, I was really lucky I didn't go over there."

* * *

*I dig Bobby Dylan
and I dig Johnny Cash
and I think Waylon Jennings
is a table-thumping smash
And hearing Joni Mitchell
feels as good as smoking grass
And if you don't like
Hank Williams, honey
You can kiss my ass.*

—"If You Don't Like Hank Williams"

IN THE EARLY 1960S, A MILITARY career was the expected route for the son of an Air Force general, and when I ask Kris about his father, his brother, his sister and his mom, all Kris says is "My dad was a two-star general, and we were a military family," as if that is supposed to explain everything. After Oxford, Kris flew an Army helicopter in Germany for three years and then volunteered for Vietnam. The Army decided he was too precious to send to the front and instead assigned him to teach at West Point, where they planned to groom him for higher offices. This was not what Captain Kris wanted – he wanted to go to the war with his men. Then, while he was on leave in Nashville, his life took a radical turn. He suddenly opted out of the Army and moved his young wife and daughter to Tennessee's music capital in the hopes of becoming a songwriter. But on the day his former unit was due to depart, he drove from Nashville to Fort Campbell to see his men off; severely intoxicated, he crashed his car outside the base and demanded to be shipped off to Vietnam. His old company commander had to talk the drunk ex-captain out of boarding the plane. He went back to Nashville and started working various construction jobs before accepting a position at Columbia Studios – as a janitor. It was 1965.

"I came down to Nashville," Kris said. "I'd been playing in an Army band, so peo-

The Essential Kristofferson

Ten key tracks: an introduction to one of America's finest songwriters
By Ethan Hawke

"Sunday Morning Coming Down" (1970)

The greatest song about a hang-over ever written. Johnny Cash's 1970 recording launched Kristofferson's career.

"Best of All Possible Worlds" (1970)

Kris' humor shines in this ode to wine and lonely girls, but it's the jailer who tells the truth: "If booze was just a dime a bottle, boy, you couldn't even buy the smell."

"Help Me Make It Through the Night" (1970)

Now a country standard, this plea for lovin' was too racy for Nashville in the Seventies. Gladys Knight best captured the song's tenderness in her 1972 cover.

"Me and Bobby McGee" (1970)

Somehow Kris managed to unite the hippie ideals with his shitkicking Texas spirit. Janis Joplin's version, from 1971's *Pearl*, was her only Number One song.

"For the Good Times" (1970)

A dark waltz of doomed love. "He can slay you with a simple sentiment of longing," says Norah Jones, who covered the tune with the Little Willies.

"The Pilgrim – Chapter 33" (1971)

Written about Kristofferson's hard-living heroes (Cash, Dennis Hopper, Ramblin' Jack), this song ended up as a self-portrait: "He's a walking contradiction, partly truth and partly fiction." Brilliantly covered by Emmylou Harris on *The Pilgrim: A Celebration of Kris Kristofferson* (2006).

"Loving Her Was Easier (Than Anything I'll Ever Do Again)" (1971)

Willie Nelson has called this his favorite Kristofferson song, which he covered on his 1979 album *Willie Nelson Sings Kristofferson*.

"Here Comes That Rainbow Again" (1983)

Johnny Cash said this track, a retelling of a scene from *The Grapes of Wrath*, "might be my favorite song by any writer." Appears on the Highwaymen's 1995 album *The Road Goes On Forever*.

"They Killed Him" (1986)

A lament for Gandhi, King and Christ, covered by Dylan on *Knocked Out Loaded*. "Havin' Dylan cover one of your songs is like being a playwright and having Shakespeare act in your play," Kris says.

"A Moment of Forever" (1995)

One of Kris' best love songs, memorably covered by Willie Nelson. "I started singing it to him," Kristofferson remembers, "and all of a sudden Willie started giggling. He thought I was singing the words about him! I was so embarrassed. Later Willie cut the damn thing and titled his album after it."

1



“I COULD’VE BEEN LOOKED AT AS A JOKE – THIS OXFORD-EDUCATED ARMY CAPTAIN SWEEPING FLOORS IN NASHVILLE.”

ple introduced me around like I was somebody. Everybody still called me ‘Captain.’ And I wrote seven, maybe 11 songs that first week. I thought if I didn’t make it as a songwriter I would at least get material to be the Great American Novelist. The people and places I was seeing were more exciting than anything I’d ever come across.”

He was introduced to Johnny Cash backstage at the Grand Ole Opry. Kristofferson described Cash as “skinny as a snake, wearing all black and as electrically wired up as anyone I’d ever seen. He was the most driven, gifted, exhilarating and self-destructive artist I’d ever met, and I wanted to be exactly like him. I was going to have to hustle to go out like Hank Williams, ‘cause I was already 29. But I thought it was the function of an artist to *burn*, not rust.”

Four long years went by. There was no novel, no record deal. Very few people noticed him at all. Kris said, “Luckily, I was *not* a good enough performer to work as a singer at the Holiday Inn . . . though believe me, I would have jumped at it, ‘cause nobody wanted my songs.”

Still, Kris saw Nashville as a “calling of sorts” that felt “right” from the start. “Nashville was like Paris in the Twenties,” he said. “We’d stay up all night trying to knock each other out with our songs. It was both kind of exciting and kind of depressing.”

Kris was bumming around, living the pauper-artist’s life, sweeping up at Columbia and tending bar at the Tally Ho Tavern. Then for two years he spent every other week in the Gulf of Mexico flying helicopters to offshore oil rigs.

“For years I couldn’t get anything cut! And I could have been looked at as a joke – here’s this Oxford-educated Army captain come to Nashville, and now he’s emptying ashtrays and sweeping the floors. But I never felt like I was failing. . . .” He pauses. “I guess occasionally I did. When my peers or my parents would remind me.”

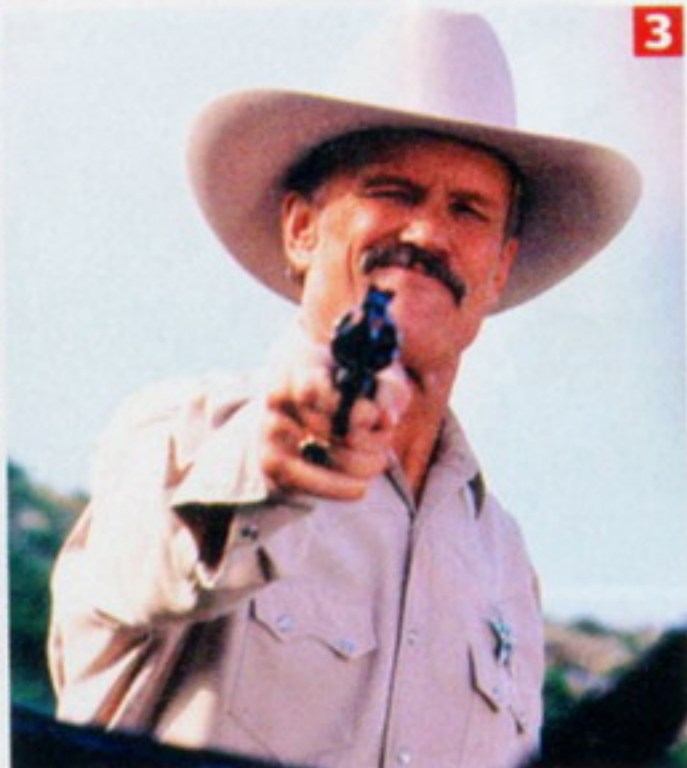
Kris’ parents came to Nashville to try to talk some sense into their son, and they ended up disowning him. Looking at footage of Kris back then, chain-smoking, hair obscuring his eyes, clothes filthy, it is easy to understand why a two-star

general may have thought his son had lost his mind.

“I told my dad I wanted to be a ‘writer,’ not a ‘songwriter.’ I knew he pictured writers wearing elbow patches and smoking pipes – not smoking the ‘funny stuff’ in Nashville. At home they always said, ‘Now, Kraig’ – he’s my younger brother – ‘Kraig will make money because he cares, and Kris won’t make any ‘cause he just doesn’t.’ Well, they were right. I never did care. Still don’t.”

In one of his first interviews, you can see a sweaty, smoky Kristofferson tell a cameraman, “Hey, man, I don’t judge people by how they look and I don’t want to be judged that way. So I just try to look as bad as possible. Makes it easier!” Then he bursts into laughter.

His parents were not amused. His mother told him, in the letter that officially broke ties with her son, that his dreams were adolescent and Johnny Cash was a bad influence: “Nobody over the age of 14 listens to that kind of music, and if they did, they wouldn’t be somebody we would want to know.”



The Hollywood Star

Kristofferson has been in more than 70 films. The young actor on the verge of stardom in 1971 (1). On the set of 1980's *Heaven's Gate* with director Michael Cimino (2). In *Lone Star*, 1996 (3). With Bob Dylan in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, 1973 (4). In the megahit *A Star Is Born*, with Barbra Streisand, 1976 (5). With Ellen Burstyn in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 1974 (6).

* * *

*On a Sunday morning sidewalk
Wishing, Lord, that I was stoned
'Cause there's something
in a Sunday that makes
a body feel alone
And there's nothin' short of dyin'
half as lonesome as the sound
on the sleeping city sidewalks
Sunday morning coming down.
—"Sunday Morning Coming Down"*

"GOD, IT WAS HARD ON THE PEOPLE around me, like my family," Kristofferson said. In 1960, he had married his high school sweetheart, Fran Beer, who had not at all bargained for the life of a struggling Nashville songwriter. "When I was smashed it seemed clear I would never write songs, nor a novel, nor do much of anything, so I drank more," he told *ROLLING STONE* in 1974. "It was very rough. When you are not doing what you think you should in life — you can take it out on your old lady." Their marriage dissolved in 1968, a year before Kristofferson's career began to take off. "Looking back," he said, "I was selfish. If I hadn't been, I never would have been able to put up with the hardship I was causing other people."

The low point came when he got fired from his job flying helicopters in the Gulf of Mexico for breaking the rule of "24 hours between the throttle and the bottle," he says.

"Shit, though, once you get right down there on the bottom, totally broke and an embarrassment to your loved ones, and it still hasn't killed you, suddenly it's all easier — nothin' left to lose, ya know?" Kris said. "But there was something taking care of me. Back when things looked the darkest, like when I lost my job in the Gulf, I thought I had hit the bottom. I had a lot of expenses at the time. I owed child support, and my son had just gone in the hospital. I had a big nut to cover. And everything turned around *right then*." Roger Miller, one of the hottest country singers at the time, cut three of Kristofferson's songs in 1969. Faron Young, Bobby Bare, Sammi Smith and Ray Price also covered his work.

Johnny Cash described meeting Kris like this: "Kris came right into the control room at Columbia sweeping up and slipped his tape to June, who gave it to me. I put it with a big pile of others that had been given to me. I think I *was* guilty of throwing some of Kris' songs into Old Hickory Lake. I didn't really listen to them until one afternoon, he was flying a National Guard helicopter and he landed in my yard. I was taking a nap and June said, 'Some fool has landed a helicopter in our yard. They used to come from the road. Now they're coming from the sky!' And I look up, and here comes Kris out of a helicopter with a beer in one hand and a tape in the other."

The beer, Kris says, is a vintage Cash flourish. "Do you know how hard it is to fly

one of those things? I don't know how the hell I'd land one holding a beer."

Beer or no beer, Johnny told Kris he'd listen to the music when he took the damn helicopter out of his yard. Kris said he'd take the helicopter away once Johnny listened to the track. The track was "Sunday Morning Coming Down."

After that, Cash said, "I liked his songs so much that I would take them off and not let anybody else hear them."

Cash decided to record "Sunday Morning" live on ABC for *The Johnny Cash Show* in 1970. He invited Kris backstage, and as they were hanging out, waiting for the show to start, the ABC censors approached Johnny, saying that the line "Wishing, Lord, that I was stoned" wasn't going to work. They suggested "Wishing, Lord, that I was home." Johnny paused and asked Kris what he thought. Kris said it didn't mean the same thing. Changing it took the piss out of it, but he was sure Johnny knew what he was doing and would respect whatever Johnny thought was best.

Then Kris was escorted up to the balcony to watch the performance.

During the chorus — and you can see this on the tapes — Johnny looks up at Kris, and then, Jim Morrison-style, booms, "Wishing, Lord, that I was *stoned*."

The helicopter pilot/janitor never had to punch a clock again. "Sunday Morning Coming Down" topped the charts and won the Country Music Association's Song of the Year, edging out "Okie From Musko-



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2



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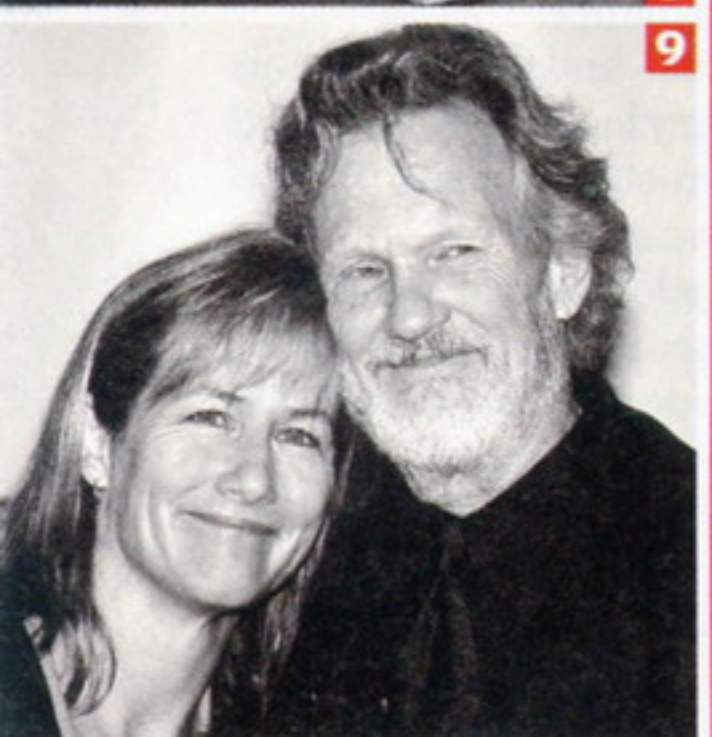


7



This American Life

Kristofferson, born into a military family, was a Rhodes scholar and an Army Ranger before becoming a songwriter. (1) Kris, age two. (2) With his family (Kris is at far left). His parents would disown him for pursuing a career in Nashville. (3) Kristofferson (right) boxing in 1958. He later enrolled in Army Jump School (4), and eventually became a captain (5). (6) As a rugby player at Pomona College. (7) Kristofferson - with Cash - received an honorary doctorate from Pomona in 1974. (8) With his ex-wife, country singer Rita Coolidge, and their daughter Casey, in 1978. The pair divorced in 1979. (9) With his wife, Lisa, at the Country Music Association Awards in 2003.



gee," in 1970. That night, the outlaw hip-pies won.

From that time forward, Kris and Johnny were brothers in arms.

* * *

*We used to drink about
a bucket of booze
To try and chase away
the black and blues
When it come the time
to pay your dues
We gave an IOU
to the devil with a dirty smile
Which he added to the growing pile
of the promises you mean to keep
The day your dreams come true.
—"The Show Goes On"*

NEXT, KRIS BEGAN THE NERVE-RACKING process of singing his own songs.

"I'm not a performer," he said at the time. "I mean, I do it and sometimes I like it and sometimes I hate it. There are moments when it's almost as good as writing – when everything comes together. When the . . ." he paused, not wanting to sound too pre-tentious. "Just everything is working, you know? Like when I was playing football and we were really moving the ball forward – and you knew nothing could go wrong. Every block, every pass, every run, it couldn't go wrong – well, it can be like that onstage when, *God*." He smiled a big, shit-eating, life-loving smile. "The harmony sweeps in and holds you. It's the same feeling I had being a part of a good team. It's beautiful, because you lose yourself, which is the same thing that happens when you're writing well, or doing any true creative act. You lose consciousness of yourself as an individual. That's the great escape. It's better than booze, my boy!"

His first album, *Kristofferson*, was a commercial no-show, but serious music critics noted it as the emergence of a major new force. "He is going to go a long way, and soon," *ROLLING STONE* predicted.

While no one writes long, grateful passages about his mellifluous voice, there is something humble, honest and profound about Kris singing his own work. Willie Nelson says, "Some of my favorite singers are not really singers, like Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Shel Silverstein and Kris – but they have a way of singing that is perfect for their songs."

In 1970, Kris was playing his own stuff at the Troubadour in L.A., opening for Linda Ronstadt, when some great reviews trickled in. The music was pushing against the boundaries and definitions of "country music," but it was too early for people to understand that. It was Kristofferson's looks that sparked a wildfire with the Los Angeles tabloids. Hollywood big shots were coming in every night to check out the hillbilly poet, whom L.A. papers had taken to calling the Warren Beatty

of country music. Johnny Cash caught wind of some of the starlets Kris had been seen running with and commented, "We're shitting in the tall cotton now, aren't we, son?"

Kris was exasperated by all the talk. "People say, 'Now that you're a "sex symbol," are they taking your lyrics less seriously?' But they weren't listening to them at all before, you know?"

Dennis Hopper fell in love with the music and started coming to the club. At an afternoon party at Hopper's, Kris got so fucked up that he fell asleep in a grocery-store parking lot and missed the first show that night, leaving Barbra Streisand, among others, sitting idle in the audience.

When asked about his sex, drugs and rock & roll days, Kris quotes Blake: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." It's not clear if he's kidding.

Everybody began recording his songs: artists as varied as Gladys Knight, Ronnie Milsap, Isaac Hayes, Elvis Presley, Carly Simon, Perry Como, the Grateful Dead, Brenda Lee, Jerry Lee Lewis, Marianne Faithfull, Percy Sledge and Bob Dylan. In 1971, he had written three of the songs nominated for Best Country Song at the Grammys that year. Three more nominations came in 1973. In the years that followed, Willie Nelson and Kris led a charge that changed country music. They elevated it. They gave it sophisticated lyrics with a mature sense of sexuality, and transformed it into a kind of white man's soul music. Rosanne Cash says, "All his integrity was just bleeding onto the vinyl. He raised the bar for modern songwriters to a stratospheric level."

"Personally," says Randy Scruggs, one of Nashville's most sought-after producers, "I feel there have been only a few that truly changed the definition of country music: Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings immediately come to mind, as does Kris Kristofferson. Kris possibly more than anyone helped to define a new wave of music through his lyrics and his dedication to speaking out."

"He kinda brought us out of the Dark Ages," Willie Nelson said.

* * *

*Take the ribbon from your hair
Shake it loose and let it fall
Layin' soft against my skin
like the shadows on the wall
Come and lay down by my side
till the early morning light
All I'm takin' is your time
Help me make it through the night.
—"Help Me Make It Through the Night"*

SOON KRISTOFFERSON BECAME A significant player in the Hollywood film revolution of the 1970s. Kris accompanied Dennis Hopper to Peru to score his film *The Last Movie*, and did his

Kristofferson's Hawaiian Sessions

Teaming with producer Don Was, Kristofferson prepares a new album

I'M JUST WRITING ABOUT WHAT it's like at this end of life," Kris Kristofferson says of his still-in-progress new album, due in late summer. "I've noticed Bob Dylan is doing the same." The album will be Kristofferson's second this decade with veteran producer Don Was, who approached the singer a few years back with one question: "I asked him, 'What's your favorite place in the world to play?'" Kristofferson chose the bedroom of his remote home in Hawaii, and Was showed up there one day and recorded him playing 40 or 50 songs, solo acoustic – after a decade-long gap between albums, he had a serious backlog.

The Hawaii sessions have yet to be released, but versions of those songs formed the backbone of 2006's *This*



Old Road. And even more of them will appear on the follow-up, which may be titled *Starlight and Stone*. Among the new tracks are the bittersweet "Closer to the Bone" and "From Here to Forever," which celebrates Kristofferson's love for his kids.

Kristofferson's songwriting process has slowed down over the years. "I don't ever sit down and write a song. It's usually just goin' in my head all the time. I never worked at it like a job – I just let it hit me. I've had some of these songs for 20 years." The recording process for the new record was quick, however: Kristofferson spent just two days laying the tunes down, playing mostly on his own.

Kristofferson's voice sounded like an old man's even when he was young, and he's pleased to note that time hasn't made much difference. "I would rather listen to just about anybody singing than me," he says. "But whatever was working at the beginning, it's still working. And I'll probably keep doing it as long as it does."

BRIAN HIATT

first bit of acting, " 'cause I knew how to ride a horse."

Kris had gotten back from Peru and was performing at the Big Sur Folk Festival in Monterey, California, when he heard that Janis Joplin died. She and Kris had been lovers for a short time.

"We were both in love with what we were doing more than anything else," Kris said. "We were in love with the music."

When I first met Kris on the film *Chelsea Walls*, shooting in New York's bohemian mecca the Chelsea Hotel, he told me, "I met Janis in the elevator here, and we were both naked in about 15 minutes."

Kris had sung "Bobby McGee" for her, but he didn't know she had recorded the song in 1970 until after she died, when the producer from her label played it for him after a party held in her honor. Kris went off by himself and listened to it over and over. He couldn't believe that she had recorded it, how fucking brilliant the track was and that Janis was gone. Soon the song was a Number One single and the

He crossed genres. He was being covered by everybody! And, you see, that's what people wanted from their actors back then. They expected more. Everyone was experimenting. It wasn't just the way he looked – it was the way he moved, his voice. His presence allowed the audience inside the picture. He made it look so easy."

People usually think of great acting as some kind of exotic metamorphosis. Consider Robert De Niro in *Raging Bull* or Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Capote*. Those are deeply moving, multilayered, staggeringly well-crafted performances – magnificent examples of what I like to call "third-person acting." But there is another kind of acting that is difficult in its own way, what I think of as "first-person acting." Paul Newman was a perfect example. Life seemed to move through him. It was not a performance. He *was* those people.

At his finest, Kris has achieved real moments of grace onscreen. The simplicity of Bob Dylan and Kris bullshitting by the side of a dusty Mexican cantina in Sam Peck-

women of all ages weak-kneed for the 40-year-old songwriter.

Here's how the writer and film director Cameron Crowe ended his 1978 *ROLLING STONE* cover story on Kris:

"Can you – Kris Kristofferson – do it all?

"I have a clear image of Kristofferson yelling back his answer through a mouthful of ice.

"Look at me! I can go from *Donny & Marie* to Sam Peckinpah to Radio City Music Hall in *one week*. I'm just a rambolin' guy . . . with rangy hips. . . . 'Course I can do it all!"

* * *

*If someday you wake up in a world
that's turned on you
And nobody answers when you call
Hey, think of the easy dreamer
who believes in you
The bigger the fool
the harder the fall.*

—"The Bigger the Fool (The Harder the Fall)"

"IT'S RARE TO FACE THAT TRANSITION: TO GO FROM THE ABSOLUTE PINNACLE OF SUCCESS TO BEING UNHIREABLE."

anthem of a generation. The record company clamored for another solo album. Simultaneously, the impression he had made on those Hollywood big shots began to reverberate.

There are many musicians who have dabbled in film and actors who have tried their hand at a recording session. But only Frank Sinatra has done both on the level that Kris has, and with Sinatra it was different: Sinatra was a showman. Kris is a poet who sometimes sings and acts extremely well. "For me it was about intensity," Kris tells me, "wanting to do something, anything good! To be a part of any creative act is exhilarating. To get out there and tell the truth – through songs or through performance, it doesn't matter. I'm a good writer but I'm not a singer like the people I admire.

"I feel about my acting the same as I do about my performing. I'm sure as hell no Laurence Olivier. When it works, I feel blessed that it does, but it works just when I'm being as honest as I can be with whatever it is I am playing."

One of his early movies was Martin Scorsese's 1974 gem *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. "Back then, you could try anything," Scorsese tells me. "There was an atmosphere, and Kris – he just embodied the feeling of that moment in time 'cause he wasn't solely an actor, that's what made it.

inpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. We are watching the poet youth of America claiming the country by seizing its most iconic art form, the Western, right out of John Wayne's and Glenn Ford's hands.

That film, about friendship, betrayal, capitalism, growth and deterioration, is as defining of America's bravado, yearning and sadness as anything put on film, and Kris' thumping, honest heart drives it.

I ask Russell Crowe about Kristofferson the actor. "The magic in Kris' performances for me," he says, "is his inability to hide the truth from himself. From time to time, he may fool other people, but as painful and inconvenient as it may be, he can never not see himself and the world around him just as it is, and he is compelled to let that truth be known.

"My favorite film performance of Kristofferson's remains *A Star Is Born*," Crowe adds. "A songwriter who writes about washed-up has-beens plays one in a movie that was the zenith of his career. There is delicious irony in that."

A Star Is Born ushered Kris to the pinnacle of mainstream pop culture. He captures all the magic, self-indulgence, magnetism and narcissism of a giant star staring his own meaninglessness straight in the eyes. The movie was drippy enough to be a smash hit. The number-two-grossing movie of 1976 (behind *Rocky*), it made

KRIS AND HIS NEW WIFE, RITA Coolidge, were performing to sold-out crowds, traveling the world as a power couple and winning Grammys. Kris even scored a Best Actor Golden Globe for *A Star Is Born*. And then came *Heaven's Gate*.

"I was in a place where I'm making as much money as anybody workin' in the movies," he says. "Then, when the movie comes out – I couldn't get arrested. Well, I could get arrested, but that was about all I could do." He kind of half-laughs.

How badly *Heaven's Gate* was received cannot be exaggerated. It was Michael Cimino's first film after the acclaimed *The Deer Hunter*, and every A-list actor wanted the lead role, and Kristofferson got it.

The filming of *Heaven's Gate* ran into a myriad of problems: The budget ballooned to such an incredible degree that it became one of the most expensive movies ever made, and rumors were that the money was funding the hard-partying lifestyle of the director, cast and crew more than the production of any *Cleopatra*-like set. The film was dead before anyone saw it. At the 1980 Cannes Film Festival, one of the studio executives warned the press, "Unless control is taken from the creative people, our industry is headed for disaster."



**SUNDAY MORNING
COMING DOWN**
Kristofferson in a hotel
room on Sunset
Boulevard in 1970

Kris responded, "So who do you give it to, the uncreative people?"

"You have to understand," Scorsese tells me, "by the time *Heaven's Gate* came out, United Artists had changed hands, and the people left in charge there were just trying to handle what they had. *Raging Bull* came out in November and *Heaven's Gate* two weeks later – and the Seventies were put to rest in one night. We had the rug pulled out from underneath us. The critical establishment ended that decade by making an example out of *Heaven's Gate*, eviscerating the film and everyone associated with it and what it represented – a Western with anti-American sentiment. They'd had enough. They were done supporting individual expression in the movies. The power was given back to the marketplace. Your value was now determined by how much money you made. In the Seventies we would have thought that was crazy! We thought culture needed to be nurtured. But in the Eighties, not anymore. Why take a chance on individual voices?"

I ask Scorsese why he thinks Kris seemed to stop so abruptly as a force in mainstream culture.

"It wasn't just Kris, you understand, the whole climate changed."

Seeing the film a quarter-century later, to me, *Heaven's Gate* brims with

beauty, power and artistry. Kris is the film's workhorse, carrying its weight effortlessly.

* * *

*Got a song about a soldier
ridin' somewhere on a train
Empty sleeve pinned to his shoulder
and some pills to ease the pain
Started drinkin' in El Paso
he was drunk in San Antone
Tellin' strangers who were sleeping
how he hated going home
Just a simple song of freedom
he was never fighting for
No one's listening when you need 'em
Ain't no fun to sing that song
no more.*

—"Broken Freedom Song"

AS REAGAN TOOK THE OATH OF OFFICE, the country began to embrace a different set of values and needed a new set of idols.

"Don't look back, something might be gaining on you" is a Satchel Paige quote Kris put on the back of one of his early albums. Whatever that "something" was, it had caught up with him. Everything went to hell.

"What is even more difficult than failure," he tells me, "is when you are perceived as a 'success' and you are failing."

There are tales of Kris drinking two bottles of whiskey a day, rumors of womanizing and drug abuse. His records stopped selling, gigs were canceled, ugly gossip swirled around his divorce from Coolidge, the critics who had been so warm became cruel, friends and collaborators died, his agent and his label dropped him. Kristofferson didn't field another serious offer to act for more than four years.

"It's rare to have that kind of opportunity, to face that kind of transition, to go from the absolute pinnacle of success to being unhireable," he says. "And my personal life was falling apart at the exact same moment. My marriage to Rita Coolidge got hit from behind by a truck. All of a sudden, I was a bachelor father taking care of our little girl. People would come up to me and say, 'Didn't you used to be somebody?' I was in a pretty dazed condition."

Hank Williams died at 29, Woody Guthrie at 55, Townes Van Zandt at 52. One of the remarkable things about Kris is that he lived so fast, burned so bright, crashed so hard, and survived.

He met his third wife, Lisa Meyers, at a gym. One day she asked him if he wanted to go for a run. He said, "Listen, I get up in the morning and take my little girl to school and I pick her up when school is over, and that's all I can handle right now. I have a very complicated life." [Cont. on 78]





CLOSE-UP

Shepard Fairey Fights for "Hope"

SHEPARD FAIREY'S

"Hope" poster of Barack Obama is already one of the most iconic images in campaign history; the original now hangs in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. Everyone from Bill Maher to *MAD* magazine has parodied it; there's even an application that turns your Facebook profile photo into a Fairey-style image. "It was a genuine grass-roots thing," Fairey says. "It made a difference. That's what really made me happy."

Fairey came out of the East Coast skateboard-punk scene, and his often-provocative stickers and posters have been appearing on city streets for years. "He's a leader of street art," says curator Pedro Alonzo. "He's constantly playing with ideas of advertising and propaganda."

But now the 39-year-old is in the legal fight of his life. On February 6th, on his way to the pre-

POSTER KING

Fairey in his Echo Park studio. "The punk ethos helped me get to where I am," he says, "but I have to be a little smarter now."

miere of a career retrospective in Boston, police stopped his taxi and arrested him on vandalism charges — some of which date back a decade.

"The vandal squad was watching my show because they thought it was terrible that someone like me was being put on a pedestal," says Fairey. He spent the night in jail and faces up to 87 years if convicted.

"I was having a great time until I got arrested in Boston, and I had the AP thing all within three days of each other," he says, sitting in his studio in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. "The AP thing" is a copyright battle with the Associated Press over his use of one of their photos as a starting point for the "Hope" poster. "This has nothing to do with what I did," says Fairey. "My image was so high-profile that they're using it as a way to say, 'Don't mess with our stuff or you're going to get sued.'"

Fairey is currently finishing a poster of Paul McCartney for a concert benefiting the David Lynch Foundation on Transcendental Meditation. The walls of his office are covered in original drawings by Raymond Pettibon and photographs of the Clash, the Sex Pistols and the Ramones.

The fight has taken its toll. "Lawsuits are the center of my world right now," he says. "I'm having trouble sleeping. But last year was amazing. I wouldn't take anything back." **STEVE APPLEFORD**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ART STREIBER



Yo hey, I'm Paul, the original Dollar Menuaire. I'll admit it. I'm kind of a risk taker. Last week,



www.mcdonalds.com/dollar

I threw in this red t-shirt with a load of whites. A sock came out pink, but no pain, no gain. So I like a safe bet sometimes to, ya know, keep my balance. As luck would have it, there's the Dollar Menu. It's pretty much loaded with **choice choices**. There's no wrong answer in the whole bunch. So it keeps my yin balanced with my yang. So to speak.

Dollar M Menu

i'm lovin' it®

At participating McDonald's. ©2008 McDonald's

Reviews

NEW CDS Pg. 66
SINGLES Pg. 69
MOVIES Pg. 76
CHARTS Pg. 82



More is more:
Prince floods
the zone with
three albums
of new music

Prince ★★★½
MPLSoUND NPG

Prince ★★★
LOTUSFLOW3R NPG

Bria Valente ★★
Elixer NPG

BY GAVIN EDWARDS



LEAVING ASIDE the Super Bowl halftime show and the assless pants, Prince is like Woody Allen: They're both reclusive, sex-obsessed geniuses who release new material relentlessly and without any regard to the law of diminishing returns. Prince's recording career now spans 31 years: Counting fan-club records, he's averaged more than one studio album per year. His latest release actually contains three separate albums, including one he wrote and produced with his new protégée, Bria Valente. The package is excessive and uneven, of course, but it's also intermittently brilliant and a real bargain (that is, if you buy it for \$11.98 at Target – not so much if you download it with a \$77 membership at lotusflow3r.com).

Prince played every instrument on *MPLSoUND* – just like the old days, only now he gets obsessive with Pro Tools. He isn't as bawdy as he once was (becoming a Jehovah's Witness will do that), but he's still got a lot of humor and swagger. On the funky "(There'll Never Be) Another Like Me," he sings about his beauty routine (it involves olive oil in his hair), and on the seven-and-a-half-minute "Ol' Skool Company," he

covers issues from the TARP bailout to the state of radio ("If the White House is black/We gotta take the radio back").

Five of *MPLSoUND*'s nine songs sound like lost B sides from assorted classic Prince albums (*Dirty Mind*, 1989, *Controversy*, etc.); these days, even a really good Prince song usually reminds the listener of a better, earlier one. What really hamstrings the album, though, is a four-song sequence in the middle: Two syrupy ballads, one overlong tribute to Valente and one Caribbean-inflected number that sounds like a Smoove B seduction.

On *LOtUSFLOW3R*, Prince has a specific mission: showcasing his long-underrated guitar playing. Whether it's the spare funk of "Wall of Berlin," the metal grind of "Dreamer" or the hazy cover of "Crimson and Clover," the music kicks into high gear when Prince starts soloing, delivering one epic face melter after another in a style halfway between David Gilmour's and Eddie Hazel's. The drawback is that when he isn't playing guitar, the music on this disc is oddly muted – you keep waiting for Captain Six-String to fly in and save the day. It's OK to call a song "Love Like Jazz," but the jazz in the title shouldn't be cocktail jazz.

It's been more than a decade since Prince successfully launched the career of a female sidekick, but he's trying again with Valente. Prince has touted *Elixer* as a quiet-storm album in the Sade mode, but most of it is just generic pop ballads. The lyrics are memorable only when they're clunky ("Taste the rainbow," goes one line, which sounds like it could have come from a Skittles ad). Valente has a pleasant, if thin, voice – she doesn't have the chops to elevate this material into anything memorable. There is one gem here: The catchy dance number "2Nite," where Valente whispers over insistent disco keyboards. One day, it, along with the best tracks from *MPLSoUND* and *LOtUSFLOW3R*, will sound right at home on Prince's inevitable box set: *2 Much of a Good Thing*.

Key Tracks: "Wall of Berlin," "Ol' Skool Company"

Return of the Guitar Fuzz

The Nineties come charging back with an army of distorted riffs on 'Swoon'

Silversun Pickups ★★★★★^{1/2}

Swoon Dangerbird



THE GUITAR DISTORTION THAT EATS UP much of the air on *Swoon* – the fine, at times genuinely exciting second album by Silversun Pickups – comes in many forms, including wounded-bear roars, pissed-off-snake hisses and black-syrup rivers of drone. In one song, "Panic Switch," singer-guitarist Brian Aubert is a fuzz orchestra unto himself, opening with a dirty grunting lick, jumping into the chorus with an iron wall of strum and stuffing the bridge with rusted treble. At one point, he hits thick, humming notes that slither over Nikki Monninger's bass and Christopher Guanlao's drums like impatient snakes. There is also an uncanny resemblance to the great toothpaste-fuzz lead in Iron Butterfly's 1968 freakout "Iron Butterfly Theme."

In their own way, this Los Angeles quartet are boldly retro, drawing from the noisy distress of Nineties alternative rock, particularly the neopsychedelic convulsions of Smashing Pumpkins and the British om-pop band Ride. *Swoon* improves on the Pickups' 2006 debut, *Carnavas*, with less slavish writing and more articulated dynamics. In "Growing Old Is Getting Old," Aubert sounds like he's singing from behind the bass and Joe Lester's dusk-light keyboards. Later, as the rest of the band bolts forward in the mix, so does Aubert, his guitar chords verging on screams. "Sort Of" is a wily Cure-like mix of viscera (tumbling drums, explosive guitar) and vocal anxiety.

The Pickups know how to create a mood, not always when to break it. "Draining" is all shuffle and sigh, a dip in momentum after the decisive violence of "Panic Switch." But there is a purpose here, to find daylight and enjoy it, that is totally pop. "We slide into delight," Aubert sings in "Growing Old," in overdubbed harmonies that are more Prefab Sprout than Pearl Jam, as distortion swells around him. His band still has some growing to do, but it knows how to have fun with fuzz and where to find the beauty in noise.

DAVID FRICKE

Key Tracks: "Panic Switch," "Growing Old Is Getting Old"



THE NEW NOISE BRIGADE Joe Lester, Christopher Guanlao, Brian Aubert, Nikki Monninger (from left)

Pearl Jam **REISSUE**

★★★★★

'Ten': Super Deluxe Edition
Legacy

PJ's debut gets the most deluxe of all deluxe reissues



THE MUSIC INDUSTRY has been trying to replicate *Ten* since its release (sometimes getting lucky – I'm looking at you, Creed). This two-CD, one-DVD, four-LP set is the most lavish of four new reissues of Pearl Jam's 1991 debut. Hardcore fans will glory in touches like the cassette replica of an early demo tape. But *Ten*'s powerful remix at Brendan O'Brien's hands is the main event: "Alive" hits harder; "Black" feels broader in scope; and Eddie Vedder's soaring vocals on "Oceans" shine brighter. All that said, this is an exercise for die-hards and audiophiles: To PJ's credit, the original didn't leave much room for improvement.

P.V. STUMP

Key Tracks: "Alive," "Black," "Oceans"

Bat for Lashes

★★★★★^{1/2}

Two Suns Astralwerks

U.K. singer has metaphysical tastes, but her talent is real



RADIOHEAD handpicked her to tour with them last year, but Natasha Khan would have probably felt more comfortable at some Renaissance fair, playing only for unicorns. With Autoharp odes to crystal knights and songs that claim to channel her alternate personality, "Pearl," the British singer-songwriter might be indie rock's only authentic mystic. Somehow, the music melts away the potential for hokeyness: Pounding on pianos, cranking out delicate little click-clack beats and shivering through choruses with an ultraromantic soprano, Khan proves she's a powerhouse under her billowy sleeves. She could be the next Kate Bush – or, at the very least, she could be Björk's new spirit animal.

MELISSA MAERZ

Key Tracks: "Daniel," "Sleep Alone"

Pet Shop Boys

★★★★

Yes *Astralwerks*

Euro-disco veterans retain acid wit, find philosophy



FOR NEARLY 25 years, the Pet Shop Boys have been Euro-disco's poet laureates, setting epigrams worthy of Oscar Wilde to thumping Hi-NRG production. On their excellent 10th album, the music leans toward the ornate, with snatches of Tchaikovsky and spaghetti-Western atmospherics enveloping the synths and house beats. Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe are now past 50, and some songs take a surprisingly philosophical turn. But even romantic moments like "Love etc." are spiked with acid wit. "I believe that we can achieve/The love that we need," Tennant croons, adding, "You don't have to be beautiful/But it helps."

JODY ROSEN

Key Tracks: "Love etc.," "Beautiful People"

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Mastodon

Crack the Skye *Reprise*

A year and change after its lead singer had his skull fractured in a fight, the most important young band in metal set out to meet the masses for its Metallica moment, moderating its relentless assault (a bit) and joining forces with producer Brendan O'Brien. Whatever Mastodon have dropped in power, they've gained in hooks: There will be naysayers among the metal faithful, but this is an awesome display of power.



Peter Bjorn and John

Living Thing

Almost Gold/StarTime International

This Stockholm trio's fifth disc offers more of what made "Young Folks" an international hipster anthem: infectious electro-acoustic tunes framing tales of romance and its discontents. *Living Thing* is one of the records of the year for beat mavens, whether you like clattery drums à la Depeche Mode ("It Don't Move Me") or South African township jive ("Living Thing").



The-Dream

Love vs. Money *Def Jam*

With his second album, this singer and hit-making songwriter (he co-wrote "Umbrella" and "Single Ladies") has conjured up a nearly perfect babymaking CD. The sex-crazed lyrics are nothing special, but many tunes are unforgettable, thanks to the combination of classic songcraft, wild sound collage and a muse that partakes equally of the sensual and the silly. "Cupid ain't got shit on me," Dream sings. No argument here.

The Pains of Being Pure at Heart

★★★★½

The Pains of Being Pure at Heart *Slumberland*

Brooklyn kids debut with a Morrissey jones and cool pop



YES, THE NAME IS so twee, it was probably lifted from some emo kid's Hello Kitty

diary. But make no mistake: This quartet's exciting debut is a dark bodice-ripper for the buttoned-up-cardigan set. Blanketed in dreamy Jesus and Mary Chain-inspired noise-pop and fuzzy boy/girl harmonies, the Pains whisper tales of incest and library-stack hook-ups with vaguely British drollery. Recounting student-teacher indiscretions on "The Tenure Itch," frontman Kip Berman sings, "He says your thoughts need form/But your form's not hard to find."

M.M.

Key Tracks: "This Love Is Fucking Right," "Young Adult Fiction"

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Various Artists

★★★★½

Score! 20 Years of
Merge Records:
The Covers! Merge

Ryan Adams, Bright Eyes
cover Merge classics



FOR ITS 20TH birthday, North Carolina indie label Merge Records invited artists such as Ryan Adams, Bright Eyes and Death Cab for Cutie to cover 20 of its classic tunes. The bands get to work with enthusiasm: Okkervil River turn East River Pipe's "All You Little Suckers" into a dreamy, electro-fied slow dance; the Shins do a jangly version of Tenement Halls' "Plenty Is Never Enough." *Score!* is at its best when the interpretations get loose, as Tracey Thorn and Jens Lekman prove when they strip the snarkiness from the Magnetic Fields' "Yeah! Oh, Yeah!" and make it a soulful relationship lament.

NICOLE FREHSEE

Key Tracks: "Plenty Is Never Enough," "Yeah! Oh, Yeah!"

Bob Mould

★★★★

Life and Times *Anti-*

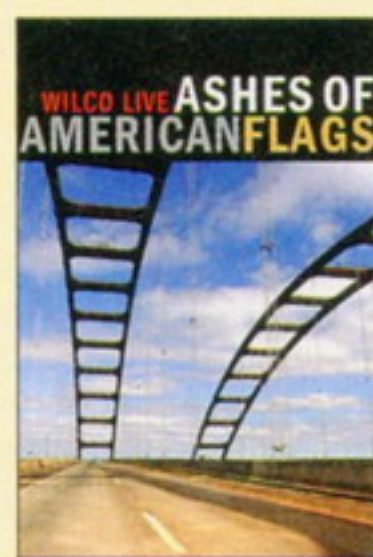
Ex-Hüsker Dü frontman
reloads guitar blitz



ON HIS NINTH solo album, this indie-rock godfather revisits some familiar sounds – namely, the distorted blitzkrieg of his days with Hüsker Dü and the hard pop of his next band, Sugar. *Life and Times* lacks memorable melodies, and cuts like the slow-moving "City Lights (Days Go By)" feel a bit too sober. But the buzzsaw guitars on "MM 17" are insistent and grooving, and Mould's visit to a sex club on the blazing "Argos" is unnecessary – the storm of guitars here is proof enough that he's still alive and kicking. CHRISTIAN HOARD

Key Tracks: "Argos,"
"The Breach," "MM 17"

DVDS



Wilco ★★★★★½

Ashes of American Flags

Nonesuch

Flags follows Wilco as they tour from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to New Orleans, passing abandoned cities and gravel roads – it's as much about how America is changing as it is about a band. The strong concert footage in small venues doesn't hurt. MELISSA MAERZ

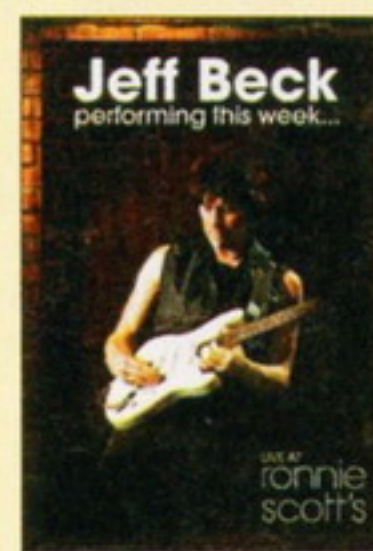


Leonard Cohen

★★★★½

Live in London Columbia

He's playing to a sold-out 20,000-seat arena, but the 74-year-old Cohen makes it look and feel like a tiny club – until he breaks out "Hallelujah," and it becomes a church. See him live if you can. ANDY GREENE



Jeff Beck ★★★★★½

Performing This Week...
Live at Ronnie Scott's

Eagle Rock

The Stratocaster master bounces back with a ferocious jazz-rock fusion set. Eric Clapton and Joss Stone drop by, but not even Slowhand steals the thunder that roars from Beck's whammy bar. BARRY WALTERS

Joker's Daughter ★★★★★

The Last Laugh

Team Love

Flighty singer + Danger
Mouse = Hi-def freak folk



BY THE TIME London-based Helena Costas coos, "The voice of Merlin echoes through the moors," the fairy dust on her psych-folk debut is pretty thick. While she riffs on redwoods and rainbows over delicate acoustic guitar, collaborator Danger Mouse adds whimsical synth whirs, lava-lamp rhythmic burbles and even actual grooves. Like Alice's Wonderland, the world of Joker's Daughter is freakish and marvelous by turns, a perfect soundtrack for your next mushroom tea party.

WILL HERMES

Key Tracks: "Go Walking,"
"Lucid," "Jelly Belly"

Lady Sovereign ★★

Jigsaw Midget

Pint-size U.K. rapper goes
her own way



BEFORE M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" took off, Lady Sovereign was the U.K. gal MC set to blow up the U.S. – which she did for a minute in 2006 with "Love Me or Hate Me." Her second LP rewrites her script with amusingly out-of-character club pop and more emo-rap introspection. But producer Medasyn's beats are uneven, and so is Sov's hood-rat humor: weak on what should be a layup college-pub rant, inexplicable on a song about sex with food. "I feel a little tired," she chants at one point. Get the girl a Red Bull, pronto.

W.H.

Key Tracks: "Jigsaw," "So Human," "I Got You Dancing!"

TOP SINGLES

Jane's Addiction

★★★★

"Chip Away," "Whores"

ninja2009.com

Anticipating these reunited beatniks' tour with Nine Inch Nails, Trent Reznor has re-produced two decades-old Jane's numbers, releasing them as part of a free digital sampler EP. "Chip Away" is more substantial: Huge, tribalistic oilcan-like drums underlying Perry Farrell's most Middle Eastern undulations. "Whores" kicks in with a Dave Navarro stoner-sludge riff, but Farrell's lackadaisical air makes its center feel soft, despite one stray "uh-huh" hook that incidentally flashes on Sonny and Cher's "The Beat Goes On."

CHUCK EDDY



Navarro and Farrell

Vampire Weekend

★★★★

"White Sky"

hulu.com

Vampire Weekend recently debuted a new arrangement - complete with a poncho-wearing string section - of this live staple on *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*. "Sky" shows off the band's compact writing style; interlocking pizzicato-violin riffs, South African-style guitar lines and a swooping falsetto chorus that recalls Paul Simon (no duh) and Frankie Valli (for real).

MICHAEL ENDELMAN

The Rumble Strips

★★★★½

"London"

myspace.com/
rumblestripsuk

On this groovy Mark Ronson-produced single, these former ska dudes deliver a polished, Phil Spector-esque symphony full of giant drums, squiggly horns, chorales and strings steeped in reverb. Some things haven't changed, though: Charlie Waller's impassioned yelps still ring through loud and clear.

K.O.

Open Happiness

★★★

"Open Happiness"

All major services

Butch Walker produced and co-wrote this Coke-sponsored power ballad, which is meant to "uplift and inspire." But the all-star guest list of Brendon Urie, Patrick Stump, Travis McCoy, Janelle Monae and co-writer Cee-Lo Green just makes this feel like a "We Are the World" pileup rather than the dawn of a new age.

K.O.

Mandy Moore

★★★★

"I Could Break Your Heart Any Day of the Week"

All major services

This bouncy, Seventies-ish cut offers a frank assessment of Moore's love life, and there's really no question as to who wears the pants: "I can turn you on, or I can turn the other cheek." Watch your back, Ryan Adams!

N.F.

Brazilian Girls With David Byrne

★★★★★

"I'm Losing Myself"

All major services

Byrne is on a roll with his dance-y collaborations; this is his third of 2009. He hooks up with the New York electro trio for a clattering jam that has him nearly rapping over a gloriously mind-tickling LCD Soundsystem-style freakout.

CARYN GANZ

Rye Rye feat. M.I.A.

★★★★

"Bang"

myspace.com/
tharealryerye

This spare, cheap-effects jam from M.I.A.'s protégée is a hot early hip-hop throwback. Best is Rye Rye's voice: high-pitched like a chipmunk but definitely not cuddly. "Throw your fucking sets up!" she yells. Why not?

KEVIN O'DONNELL

Bonnie "Prince" Billy

★★★

Beware *Drag City*

Troubadour assembles barn dance of the damned



ALMOST EVERY song on Will Oldham's latest album has a personal

pronoun in its title - lots of "I" and "you." The unspecific lyrics are flatly whined in the manner of a depressed old codger falling asleep. Tempos stay sluggish and melodies meander, often parodying bygone rural music - funeral hymn here, waltz there. An array of hip Chicago instrumentalists approximates a Salvation Army band heard 300 yards down the shoreline. And on those rare occasions when Oldham gives them room, flutes or hand claps or pedal steel manage an energy that the singer himself can't be bothered with.

C.E.

Key Tracks: "You Don't Love Me," "I Am Goodbye"

Jim Jones

★★★★½

Pray IV Reign *Columbia*

Dipset rapper makes his big pop move



WITH HIS fourth album, Harlem rapper Jim Jones tries to please

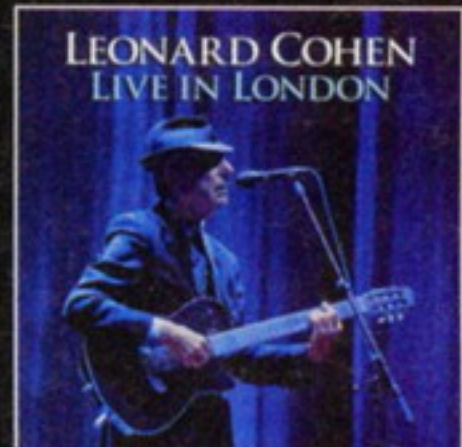
just about everyone, mixing up radio hits, club tracks, weepy slow ones and a Cam'ron dis (the menacing "Frienemies"). He rhymes more like a ghetto businessman than a natural talent, sprinkling gruff rhymes with silly lines such as "Nig-gas is pussy like diaphragms." But his open-armed commercialism mostly works: "Na Na Na Na Na Na" turns a kid's chant into a catchy cash-flaunting song that's wonderfully out of step with our current economic state.

C.H.

Key Tracks: "Frienemies," "Na Na Na Na Na Na"

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the waiting game

featuring
simple plan



When SIMPLE PLAN was dreaming of playing to sold-out arenas years ago back in Montreal, the quintet had a few less than glamorous jobs.

Singer Pierre Bouvier worked as a dishwasher at a fast food restaurant. "Even though it was a crappy job and I didn't get paid much, I had fun. It was a means to get somewhere." Drummer Chuck Comeau adds, "There were times when we thought it was hopeless, but we kept going. It's okay to dream big, even if people think you are crazy."

The tough gigs early on influenced the band's songwriting. A string of hits, a worldwide legion of fans and seven million albums sold,

Simple Plan's master plan paid off.

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REVIEWS NEW MUSIC

Neil's Electric Love Song

The rock giant is on a new kick, and it involves cars and batteries

Neil Young ★★★

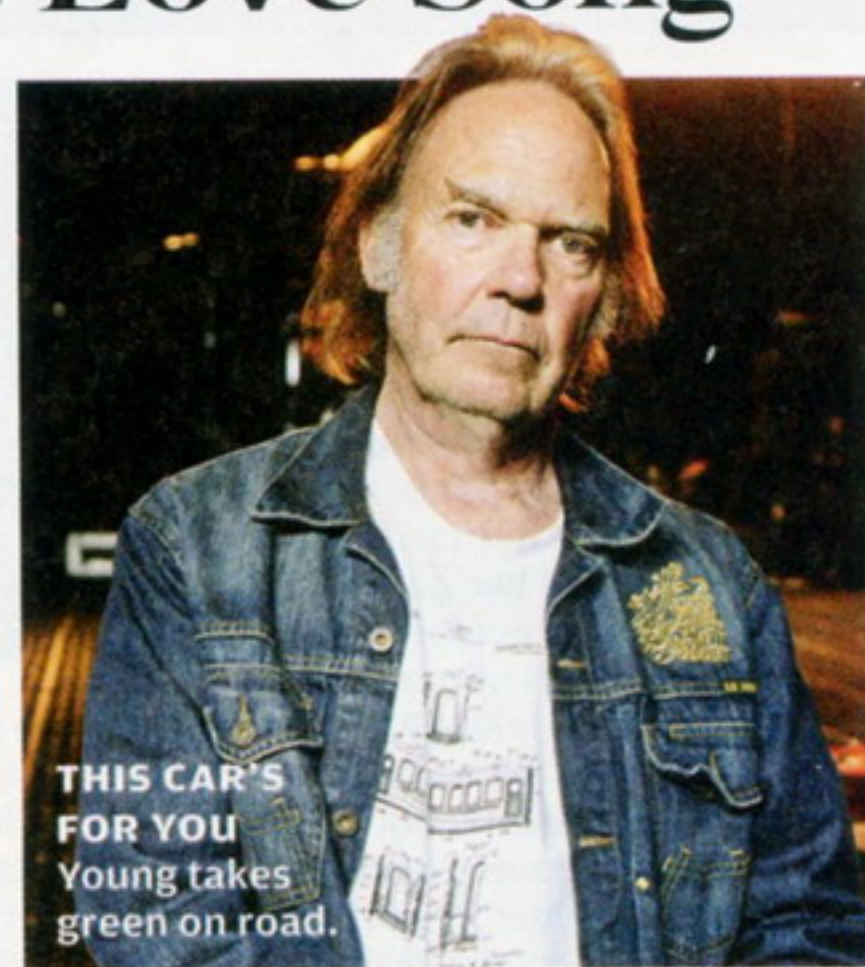
Fork in the Road Reprise



NEIL YOUNG HAS BEEN CAR-obsessed forever. His current passion is the LincVolt, a '59 Lincoln that, with some engineering help, he's pimped into an electric hybrid (lincvolt.com). *Fork in the Road* is about the LincVolt. It's also about American myth, governmental betrayal and how rust still never sleeps.

This is mostly raw, chop-shop rock & roll, so auto metaphors fit right in. "You can drive my car," he warbles, echoing the Beatles over "Cortez the Killer" guitar shards. Later he notes his ride "always wants to please," over a rockabilly grind, and "looks so beautiful with her top down." It mostly feels like tossed-off conceptual riffs, to be filed with past thematic exercises like *Trans* and *This Note's for You*. But it most resembles *Living With War* – the rock album recast as blog rant, less about

Key Tracks:
"Fork in the Road," "Cough Up the Bucks"



THIS CAR'S FOR YOU
Young takes green on road.

aesthetic craft than about spitting out what needs to be said this minute.

It's messy, funny and pretty crazy at points – like when Young snarls, "Cough up the bucks!" while sweet harmonies implore, "Where did all the money go?" or on the title track's awesome old-coot tirade. At one point, he issues a challenge: "You can sing about change/While you're making your own/You can be what you try to say." With this activist-rock blast, dude walks it like he talks it.

WILL HERMES

Doves ★★★

Kingdom of Rust

Astralwerks

U.K. trio make epics about (what else?) boring U.K.



FOR THEIR fourth record in nine years, Doves deliver gorgeous, sonically adventurous tunes dappled with strings, droning guitars, Radiohead-ish atmospherics and singer Jimi Goodwin's longing tales of lonely train rides and missing the sunshine. *Kingdom of Rust* is wonderfully dolorous, but when Doves rev up the tempos on tracks like "The Outsiders," they show they're not a total pity party. Their good cheer isn't always convincing: "Compulsion" sounds like a bad cover of Blondie's "Rapture." But they get bonus points for re-creating the keyboard sound from Steve Miller's "Fly Like an Eagle" on "Jetstream."

KEVIN O'DONNELL

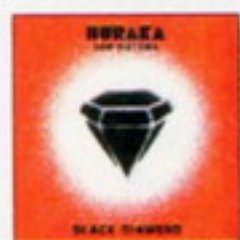
Key Tracks: "Jetstream," "10:03," "The Outsiders"

Buraka Som Sistema ★★★

Black Diamond

Fabric

Portuguese crew introduces new funk brand



BURAKA SOM Sistema are a Portuguese outfit who helped bring *kuduro* – a grimy electronic music from Angola – to the States last year on "Sound of Kuduro," a frenetic party starter with guest M.I.A. BSS's debut is a nice primer to the genre: chintzy electronics, soca and baile funk beats plus lyrics about blood diamonds and the AIDS crisis. There are moments of pristine beauty: "General" fuses thumping house music with sparkling Afro-pop guitars. After 50 minutes, the buzz wears off – less drum-and-bass grooves would've helped. But *Black Diamond* is a cool beginning to a new sound.

K.O.

Key Tracks: "Sound of Kuduro," "General"

The Boy Least Likely To ★★★

The Law of the Playground +1

"Be Gentle With Me" duo keep the cute coming



ON THEIR second album, the Boy Least Likely To's Peter Pan complex is in full swing: The Brit indie-pop act is still playing with glockenspiels and xylophones, churning out cute, charming tunes. But this time, the lyrics are a bit darker. The bright "Stringing Up Conkers" deals with emotional detachment, and when singer Jof Owen admits, "If I want to feel something/I stick pencils up my nose," over multi-instrumentalist Pete Hobbs' cheery strumming, the duo pull off something many emo bands before them couldn't: They make self-mutilation sound like just jolly good fun.

NICOLE FREHSÉE

Key Tracks: "Stringing Up Conkers," "Saddle Up"

FRICKE'S PICKS

By David Fricke

Nels Cline's Guitar World

When he joined Wilco in 2004, guitarist **Nels Cline** was already a star out in the margins, leading a prolific, acclaimed life in free rock and avant jazz as a solo performer, sideman and leader of multiple bands, including the Nels Cline Singers (it's an instrumental group). But even in a discography of more than 130 albums (so far), *Coward* (Cryptogramophone) is a rare adventure: a series of dreams and sound portraits, played by Cline on an overdubbed ensemble's worth of guitars, etc. Nearly half of *Coward* is taken up with "Rod Poole's Gradual Ascent to Heaven" - Cline's memorial for a late friend, which sounds like a room of John Faheys coming out of grief - and the suite "Onan," a wild high of hectic breakbeats, chunky noise and ecstatic psychedelia. "Prayer Wheel" and "The Divine Homegirl" are quieter spins through British-folk motifs and ECM ambience; "Thurston County" is a vigorous tribute to Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore in Balkan wedding-song time with freak-rock lightning. Cline does all of the above when he plays with Wilco. But this is a chance to hear Cline's tone-color inventions, slashing ways in a solo and the melodies lurking even in his most challenging improvisations in a dramatic, often beautiful isolation.

GUITAR DREAMS
Wilco ace Cline explores folk, noise and acid rock.



Spanish Electricity at SXSW

It was only 9 p.m. on opening night when I hit my first pay dirt of this year's SXSW in Austin: **Capsula**, a kinetic trio from Bilbao, Spain - singer-guitarist Martin Guevara and bassist Coni Duchess, the band's founding couple, are originally from Argentina - who were supposed to be obsessed with the Velvet Underground (according to a newspaper preview) but were actually a high-velocity union of the Cramps and the Who, coated in corroded glam. Guevara attacked his guitar with a serious case of Pete Townshend, and drummer Alberto Diez was an improbable mix of Keith Moon and the Velvets' Maureen

Tucker: flash with heartbeat. In the last song of the set, a furious space-out that sounded like the Who doing Pink Floyd's "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," Guevara swallowed his mike Lux Interior-style and scraped his guitar strings along the edge of the stage. You don't get those visuals with Capsula's new album, *Rising Mountains* (BCore), but you get the idea - and everything I heard.

Back in Bloom

Metallica were the biggest name in metal at SXSW '09. Reunited early-Seventies Japanese monsters **Flower Travellin' Band** were the biggest thrill,

playing at vintage strength on the final date of their first-ever U.S. tour. The set included flaming chunks of the band's 1971 apex, the album-length suite *Satori* (originally on Atlantic Japan), with guitarist Hideki Ishima re-creating his searing-raga sustain on a sitarla (a custom guitar with a sitarlike neck) and singer Akira "Joe" Yamanaka still hitting the extreme highs in his operatic-samurai range. The group also played songs from a new prog-leaning studio album, *We Are Here* (Pony Canyon), but beginners should start with reissues: the brutalized Savoy Brown and King Crimson covers on 1970's *Anywhere* and the guaranteed enlightenment of *Satori*.



"...it's a must-see"

- USA Today, The Week in Pop:
My Favorite Things by Whitney Matheson

"Laugh out loud funny
and very clever."

- Cinema Blend, TV Review
by Kelly West, January 29, 2009

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REVIEWS NEW MUSIC

Chuck Berry

★★★★★ **REISSUE**

You Never Can Tell: His Complete Chess Recordings 1960-1966 *Hip-O Select*

Second verse, same as the first: Berry's Sixties killers



CHUCK BERRY'S Sixties work doesn't have the marquee value of 1950s hits such as "Maybellene" and "Johnny B. Goode." But unlike his peers Elvis Presley and Little Richard, Berry didn't experience any real drop-off in quality: Tunes like "Bye Bye Johnny," "Nadine," "No Particular Place to Go," "Promised Land" – all of them on this four-disc follow-up to 2007's *Complete '50s Chess Recordings* – are timeless killers. *You Never Can Tell* has an academic feel, with lots of alternate takes most listeners could do without. But it also includes some great blues covers and a live set that finds Berry joking it up onstage and kicking major ass in Detroit Rock City.

MARK KEMP

Key Tracks: "Come On," "Sweet Little Sixteen (Live)"

Keri Hilson

★★★★½

In a Perfect World *Interscope*

Talented Timbaland protégée finds her groove



"I GOT A LIL' BIT of thug in me," boasts Timbaland protégée Keri Hilson in the intro on her long-awaited debut. Lil' is the operative term: Hilson works up a sweat trying to come on like a hard-boiled diva – promising to "get on my worst behavior" in the blippy single "Return the Favor" – but her precise, nimble R&B singing is a generic sound, carrying little menace or other stamp of individuality. Hilson has other skills, though. She's a member of the songwriting collective the Clutch, and the album's 14 songs – from the Polow Da Don-produced bumper "Get Your Money Up" to the simmering slow-jam "Make Love" – are uniformly excellent. Hilson's halfway there – she just needs a lil' more personality.

JODY ROSEN

Key Tracks: "Return the Favor," "Get Your Money Up"

BOOTLEG

Morrissey

Wellmont Theatre
Montclair, NJ
March 16th, 2009

Morrissey was tickled pink to be playing the home state of Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen, and he let the audience know it: "I'm working on a dream!" he sang in an operatic tone before dropping to his regular sarcastic voice. "Eh, no, I'm not." He then launched into a muscled-up "This Charming Man," from the Smiths' 1983 debut. From there – in between some more New Jersey-baiting ("Without Whole Foods I would be dead") – the Mozfather glided from solo gems ("Billy Bud") to new tracks ("Sorry Doesn't Help," "Something Is Squeezing My Skull") and just enough Smiths classics ("How Soon Is Now?" "Ask"). Morrissey's voice sounds barely dented from his 1980s heyday, and in the new songs he appears as lonely and depressed as ever – in other words, everything is fine.

ANDY GREENE

Metric ★★★★★½

Fantasies *Self-released*

Electro-rocking Broken Social Scene buddies go pop



THIS CANADIAN-American hipster quartet's first record in four years has an electrophile slickness, not to mention a set of catchy songs. Amid manicured synth-rock grooves, singer and indie-boy crush object Emily Haines delivers big refrains and spiky hooks, cooing about love on "Sick Muse" and going dark on "Help I'm Alive," a throbbing, Garbage-esque single that's bound to be played in any number of dingy indie-rock bars. Haines' lyrics don't always signify: "I'm higher than high, lower than deep," begins the vagued-out chorus to the slow-burning "Twilight Galaxy." But the tune is so fetching that you just don't care.

CHRISTIAN HOARD

Key Tracks: "Help I'm Alive," "Twilight Galaxy"

LIL WAYNE

[Cont. from 47] Wayne's own gangsta bona fides are difficult to suss out. Last year, in an interview with *Blender*, he pointed to the four tear-drop tattoos on his face – in prison culture, signifiers that you've murdered someone – and said, "Lord, forgive me." But when I ask if his mother was ever concerned about him moving in a dangerous direction, he says, "No, I've always been a good kid. You can ask her. She ain't never had to worry about that shit. I always hung with a bad crowd, but she knew I was smarter than all of them." Once he joined Cash Money, Wayne says Slim Williams always kept a watchful eye on him. "When I went on the road, I rode on his bus. When we stayed in Miami, my room was next to his room. He would always tell me, first and foremost, 'You're different from everybody else. You're not a gangster. You're not stupid. We're not going to have to worry about you getting in trouble with drugs or people trying to kill you.' Basically, he was saying, 'You're a good kid. Remain a good kid.'"

"He was an observer, more like I am," recalls Slim Williams. "Very, very intelligent kid. I tried to teach him that while you're sleeping, there's always someone else trying to take your position, so you have to work hard. All of us at Cash Money brought him up like that. It's hard in New Orleans – not too many of us make it out. I'm so proud of him, to see him doing these things now and to know where he came from."

All that said, his home life certainly wasn't easy. His stepfather, Rabbit McDonald, was shot to death when Wayne was 14. (His very first tattoo, on his right arm, reads IN MEMORY OF RABBIT: IT'S UP TO ME.) At 15, he got his high school girlfriend pregnant; in a 2007 interview, he claimed he did so at the urging of his mother, who was lonely after Rabbit's death and wanted another child to raise. Wayne's daughter, Reginae, is now 10; he also has a five-month-old son, Dwayne Jr., with another woman. "The mothers of my kids are great," says Wayne, by which he ap-

parently means "extraordinarily patient." "If I'm calling at three in the morning because I'm in Europe," he continues, "they're willing to jump on that call: 'Wake up! It's your daddy!' If I haven't seen my daughter in two months and want to see her, her mom's packing her stuff up, asking where to send it." Reginae has joined him on tour. "On the road, everybody around me knows her, so she loves that," Wayne says. "She watches the show every night and tells me, 'Daddy, you shouldn't have said that...'"

AS WAYNE MOVED into his 20s, his songs started becoming distinctly weirder. He used to write down all of his rhymes, just so he wouldn't forget them, but about eight years ago, he says he realized, "Oh, shit – you go to the studio every day. Just record it. Whatever you think about, record it." Wayne still had a notebook full of rhymes when he made this decision, and so he and his friend, the New Orleans DJ Raj Smoove, recorded them all in one sitting for the mixtape *10,000 Bars*. (You can actually hear the pages of the notebook turning on the recording.)

People who watch Wayne work in the studio today marvel at his approach. Young Money's Drake Graham, who is no stranger to hanging around musicians – his father, Dennis Graham, played drums in Jerry Lee Lewis' band, and his uncle, Teenie Hodges, was Al Green's lead guitarist in the Seventies – says it's like nothing he's ever seen before. "He'll be bopping around the room, eating candy, or he'll look like he's falling asleep," Graham says. "Then all of a sudden he'll pop up, like someone shocked him with those things you rub together in the hospital to revive someone. And he'll spit the most brilliant and witty verses you've ever heard. It's like, 'What movie just went through your head, to be able to do this without putting pen to paper?' It's scary and unfair, that man is so talented. He's not one of us."

Wayne's constant, unscripted approach to recording cer-



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tainly contributes to the appealingly loose, stream-of-consciousness feel of much of his recent material. The fact that he's perpetually high likely also helps. He says he's been cutting back on the syrup, though he denies he was ever addicted. "With addiction, you don't have control," he says. "I never felt addicted, because it was what I wanted to do."

Wayne describes himself as a "compulsionist." He likes to have the same fruit plate every day, the same cookies, his Swishers waiting for him neatly rolled. And, of course, a night is rarely complete without a trip to the studio. His associates tell me they try to get him to take time off, maybe go on vacation, but he almost always refuses. "I think that's his lifeline," says Young Money's Shanell, a beautiful former dancer for Ne-Yo who wrote "Prom Queen." "Days he can't go into the studio, if we're traveling or something, he gets edgy." (At one point, I notice Wayne draping his arm very intimately around Shanell, though when I ask if he's seeing anyone, he says, "Female? Uh... let's just say I'm always seeing someone. Leave it at that.")

"The studio is his comfort zone," says Gudda Gudda. "This dude just sold all these records, and all he wants to do is make more music. When we found out *Tha Carter III* sold a million records, we were in L.A. We set up a party for him, and he stayed on the bus to record! We went to the party for him. When we got back, he'd recorded three songs."

When I ask Wayne what drives him to go into the studio every night, he says, "Honestly, I asked myself that today. 'You're 26. Do you like anything else? You have to start getting into something else, because you're going to stop liking this soon.' And I'll have to start liking something a lot for it to become actually pursuable. The only other thing I have right now is sports, man. I watch ESPN all day long. You could go into my bedroom and see - it's on every television. I could quit music and spend all my money on game tickets."

Wayne describes his nightly trips to the studio in the terms of an out-of-body experience: "It's when you close the door to the world and jump outside of yourself. And you look at yourself and say, 'You ain't the best. Show me you're the best. Show me you can play the fucking guitar without lessons. Show me you can make a hit song and make everybody tell you, 'I love what you're doing.' Show me you can do that.' And then I come out that door and jump back in my body. I do that every night."

IT'S JUST AFTER ONE IN THE MORNING when I meet Wayne at a recording studio in Atlanta, on another deserted block near the freeway. Inside, Wayne is not exactly alone - his engineer sits in front of a huge mixing board, and a stu-

dio employee sits silently in the back of the room, doing something on a laptop. Still, the appeal of the studio - its inherent safety - is evident. The door shuts with a hermetic sucking sound, and the silence is like what you'd imagine in a space capsule or a submarine. The outer world has been completely shut out. The only sound, in fact, will be Wayne's own voice and music, the thoughts swirling around in his head.

By this point in the evening, Wayne is noticeably more stoned. His speech slurs a bit, and he's in a joking mood. A Voss mineral-water bottle filled with a pinkish liquid sits on the counter, and ESPN is playing on a TV screen above the board. After taking a puff from his asthma inhaler, Wayne tells the engineer to cue up a song he recorded the night before. It's another rap-rock hybrid. "Economy-schmeckonomy," Wayne spits over a thundering guitar track, "I'm ballin' through the recession."

Wayne tells me he's not especially worried about the economy - he has guys managing his investments and keeping

"Economy, schmeckonomy - I'm ballin' through the recession."

track of what he spends - though he has noticed a troubling indicator: "Motherfuckers asking me for money? I know they really need it now. That's the difference. Motherfuckers used to ask just because they knew I had it." Wayne didn't watch Obama's inauguration; he doesn't follow the news or read much, and his wait-and-see attitude about the new president is "show me the change." "I had it on the television," he says, chuckling sheepishly. "But something else was on, sportswise. I remember I was like, 'He talk yet?' And Beyoncé or whoever was still performing. I stopped watching when some country dude was up there singing."


Eventually, Shanell and a friend arrive. Earlier today, she's pierced her nose and had a chain connected from the piercing to her ear. Wayne winces and says, "It looks scary." Shanell frowns and says, "Scary?" Wayne says, "I mean like it hurt." He smiles sweetly and adds, "It looks nice."

HE PLAYS ME SOME MORE TRACKS. The best one recalls vintage Beastie Boys, but most of the others sound like generic emo, aside from Wayne's weird Auto-Tuned vocals, which employ little of the wit and verbal dexterity of his hip-hop verses. In this respect, the Michael Jordan-playing-baseball analogy is not entirely accurate - it's more like Jordan deciding he always wanted

to be a baseball mascot. Of course, the smash single from *Tha Carter III* was the mindless "Lollipop," a tossed-off double-entendre that showcased almost none of the talent Wayne spent years selling himself on. People didn't seem to care, in the same way people forgive Philip Seymour Hoffman or John Malkovich when they play bad guys in really dumb action movies.

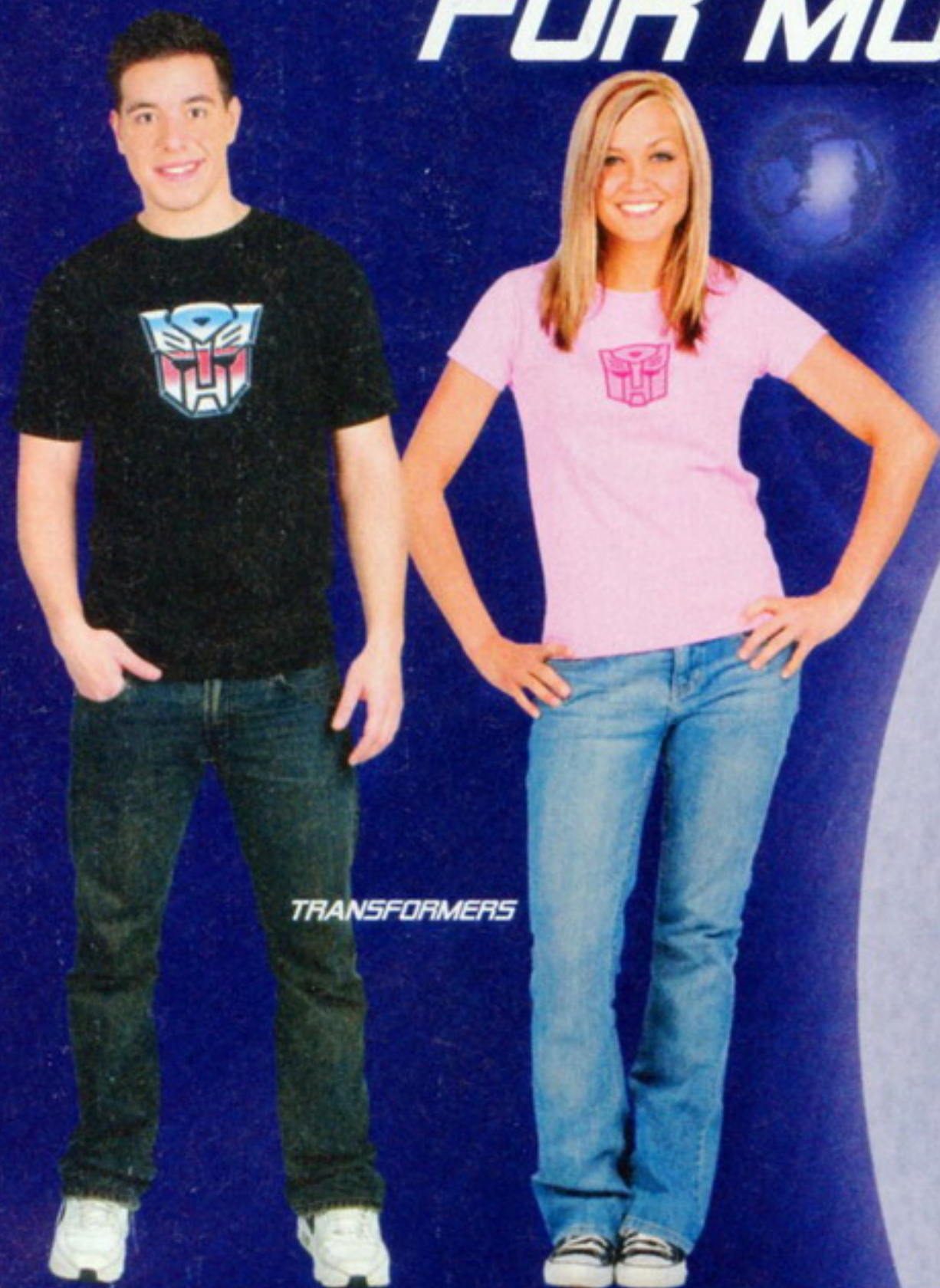
The rock tracks seem like an even more blatant grab for the mainstream. Unfortunately, the genre of rock Wayne happens to be emulating is a pretty awful one. Still, it's not like Wayne's talent is going anywhere. When he says he's going to play me a song called "I Die," one of the girls mishears and says, "Iodine?" Wayne cracks up and says, "Iodine?" Then, without pausing, raps, "I ate too much shrimp/I got i-odine poisoning!"

"The rock shit just comes from what my life is now," Wayne insists. "I've grown into this person." Wayne says he can recall the moment things changed. "I woke up one morning and had three or four women in my bed where I not only didn't know their last names, I didn't know the beginning letter of their first names. All I know is they're the most beautiful women in the world, and I was in my own place, in whatever city I was in. And I could have thrown a dart at the map, and I'd probably have a place there, too. I knew my driver was waiting downstairs for me. When my nose finally cleared from all the weed I had smoked, I smelled food in the kitchen and knew it was my chef. Then I look on my phone and see a message and know it's from a popular woman everyone knows. And when I went in the studio that night, I couldn't just rap, 'Yeah, nigga...' Now, this is who I am."

"I've never said, 'Lil Wayne is going to rock, everybody,'" Wayne continues. "I just got - I'm not going to say 'so good' at what I was doing, but it became such a regularity for me that I got tired of it. And then I said, 'You know what? I'm not going to rap on this one.' I always knew I couldn't sing, but I also knew I had a voice that isn't heard by many, and that I could learn how to stretch it and make songs sound good. Therefore, I practiced that. Honestly? I don't want to be the best rapper in the world. Not now. If I have a rap album I'm dropping, then I want it to be the best rap album. But I want to be the best. Period. Now. My favorite rapper hasn't done what I'm doing." 

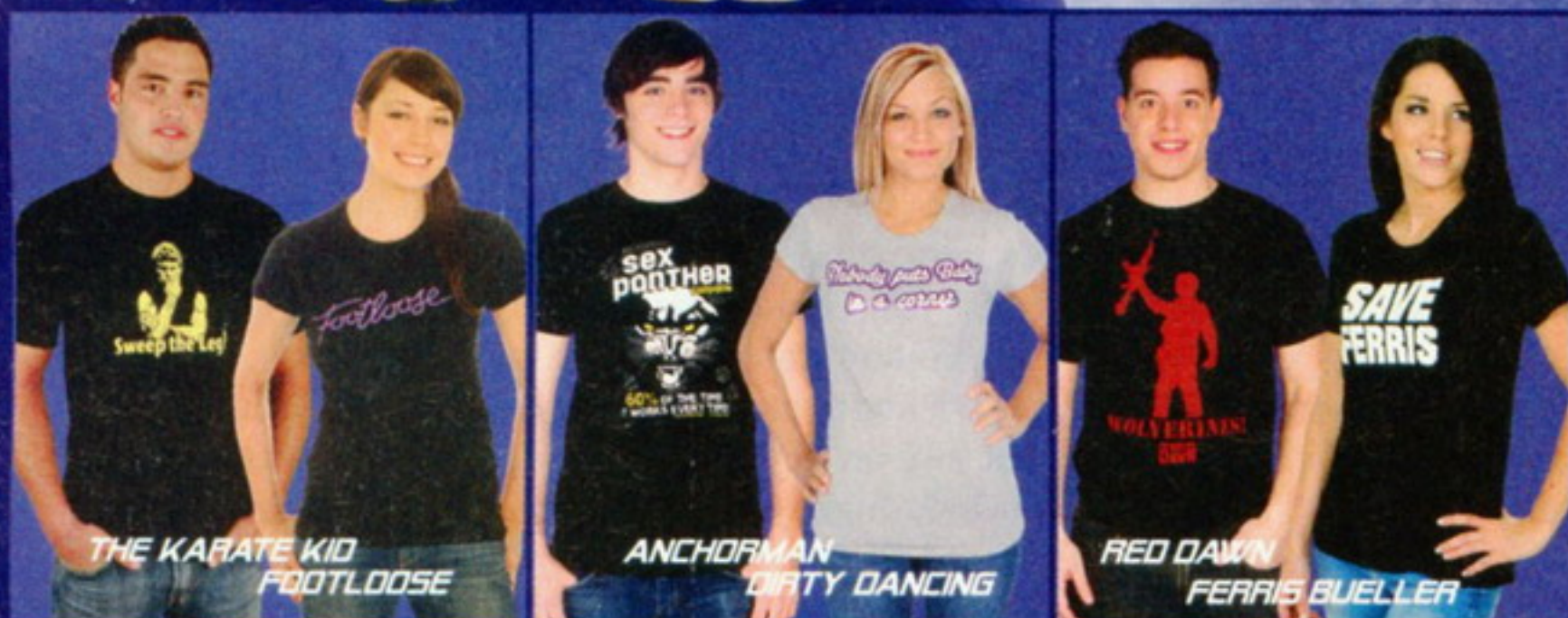
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Movies

BY PETER TRAVERS



NEW MODEL, OLD PARTS Vin Diesel gives good action (above), and with Paul Walker (inset).



Déjà Vroom

Buckle up for a new spin on auto eroticism with Vin Diesel

Fast and Furious

★★

Vin Diesel, Paul Walker

Directed by Justin Lin

TWITTER USERS COULD FIT everything that makes a lick of sense in *Fast and Furious* on a single 140-character tweet, and still have room to review the movie as “IMHO idiotic but fun. hate myself for getting off on hot cars, hotter women. bad dialogue enjoyable, also exhausting. two hours of life hijacked. no hope of recovery.”

Take the title – *whaaaat!* *The Fast and the Furious* came out in 2001. Isn't it early for a remake? Easy, there. Though shamelessly redundant, *Fast and Furious* is technically a follow-up, not a redo. Studio brainiacs simply zapped the title of the pesky “the” – both of them – and, presto, everything old is new again. Yeah, but what about the first two sequels – *2 Fast 2 Furious* and *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, which Vin Diesel wisely opted out of? Diesel is back, along with his original co-star, Paul Walker, making this a fresh

start, kind of. So just when you're going, “I get it, this is the fourth chapter in the franchise” – I have to stop you. *Fast and Furious* is actually the prequel to *Tokyo Drift*, which makes it Chapter Three.

Oh, fuck it! If you care about this movie – and multitudes do – you'll figure it out. Newbies aren't likely to play catch-up. Look at the diminishing box-office results: The first one grossed \$145 million, the second (without Diesel but with Walker) did \$127 million, the third (without either) limped to \$63 million. That blows the theory that audiences are just in it for the cars. So coaxing Diesel back was crucial.

Is Diesel worth his fat paycheck? I'd say yup. The former bouncer has always been a better actor than his rep would have it – check him out in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Boiler Room*, *Pitch Black* and Sidney Lumet's *Find Me Guilty*. The problem is that Diesel let his brawn and basso rumble trap him in caveman junk such as *xXx*, *The Chronicles of Riddick* and *Babylon A.D.* until he became

a literal joke as a baby sitter in *The Pacifier* (a hit, by the way).

You could look at Diesel's return as Dom as crass capitulation to image whoring. Or you could just go with the dumb flow and watch him make a wicked tease of the role that put him on top.

We pick up Diesel's fugitive ex-con, Dominic Toretto, when he sneaks back to Los Angeles for a friend's funeral (we know who got murdered, and we ain't tellin'). Dom wants revenge; so does Brian O'Connor (Walker), a federal agent who wronged him. The police are chasing Dom, but despite his bulk, eye-catchingly tight T-shirts and habit of flooring it on city streets, the cops can't nab the dude. Instead of cuffing Dom, Brian joins the big lug to catch a Mexican heroin importer whose business conveniently involves drag-racing. As the movie detours in lesbo action and toe-sucking (you heard me), the link to logic in Chris Morgan's script evaporates.

That said, the movie is a used car that can occasionally choke to life and burn up the road.

Diesel and Walker look jazzed to be beating the shit out of each other and then making up. Despite past betrayals, these two have a history. Brian still loves Mia (Jordana Brewster), Dom's sister. And Dom pines for Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), even though bad-girl Gisele (Gal Gadot) is panting to get under his hood.

The babes don't stand a chance against the cars. Muscle or import, they're all sex objects (props to the Lamborghini LM002). Director Justin Lin (*Tokyo Drift*) still hasn't learned film geography. Even the kinetic tunnel races, meant to nitrocharge the movie, fall flat from spatial incoherence. You barely know what's happening, and to whom.

And yet I can see why *Fast and Furious* might be a smash as audiences look for escape from a broken economy. All those wheelies and power slides are designed to obliterate thought, not provoke it. Talk about a movie for its time.

Adventureland

★★★½

Kristen Stewart, Ryan Reynolds, Jesse Eisenberg
Directed by Greg Mottola

DIRECTOR GREG MOTTOLA hit a low-comic high with *Superbad*, which sets up a raucous promise. *Adventureland* doesn't even want to keep. This look at college kids working in a tacky Pittsburgh amusement park in the summer of 1987 is drawn from Mottola's own life. The writer-director blends sassy and sad in the style of his 1996 debut, *The Daytrippers*.

Jesse Eisenberg (*The Squid and the Whale*) subs for Mottola as James, a pothead with an unpopped cherry and the hots for Em (*Twilight*'s Kristen Stewart), who is sneaking off with married handyman Mike (a miscast Ryan Reynolds). Eisenberg and Stewart bring delicate emotion to their roles, but their romance is recycled from musty Hollywood inventory. Aside from the Eighties soundtrack ("Rock Me Amadeus" – yikes!), the fun comes from the delicious comic twists provided by *SNL*'s Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig as the park owners (these two bona fide talents deserve their own movie) and Martin Starr as a Jewish brainiac who reads Gogol and sees anti-Semitism in every first date. *Adventureland* throws a lot at us, but not enough of it sticks.

Sugar ★★★½

Algenis Perez Soto

Written and directed by
Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck

STEP UP FOR THIS GROUND-breaking film about race, class, money, sex, isolation, the immigrant experience, lost ideals and – oh, yeah – baseball. On the surface, *Sugar* sounds pretty rah-rah. Miguel Santos (Algenis Perez Soto), nicknamed Sugar, is a 19-year-old poverty-row Dominican who rides his wicked curveball to a shot at the U.S. big time. Hey, it happened for Sammy Sosa and Pedro Martinez, among others. But *Sugar* doesn't follow the trite Hollywood game plan. Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, the filmmaking couple who share writing and directing duties, are seemingly aller-



DARK LAUGHS Kristen Stewart (above) hides her pain. Right: Seth Rogen stalks Anna Faris.

gic to formula. Exhibit A is the no-bull artistry of *Half Nelson*, their 2006 debut starring an Oscar-nominated Ryan Gosling as a crackhead teacher.

From the time Sugar leaves home for minor-league tryouts, first in Arizona and then in heartland Iowa, the film takes us inside the head of a stranger in a strange land. Barriers are erected by language, religion, food, even Sugar's erotic attraction to the daughter (Ellary Porterfield) of the Iowa couple he boards with. Soto, new to acting but not baseball, scores a knockout, nailing every nuance in a complex role.

When an injury screws up Sugar's career trajectory, he skips out for Manhattan and a brush with darkness. And that's enough with the plot details, except to say that Boden and Fleck are exceptional talents who refuse to sweeten *Sugar* for mass consumption. The result is raw and riveting.



Observe and Report ★★★

Seth Rogen, Anna Faris

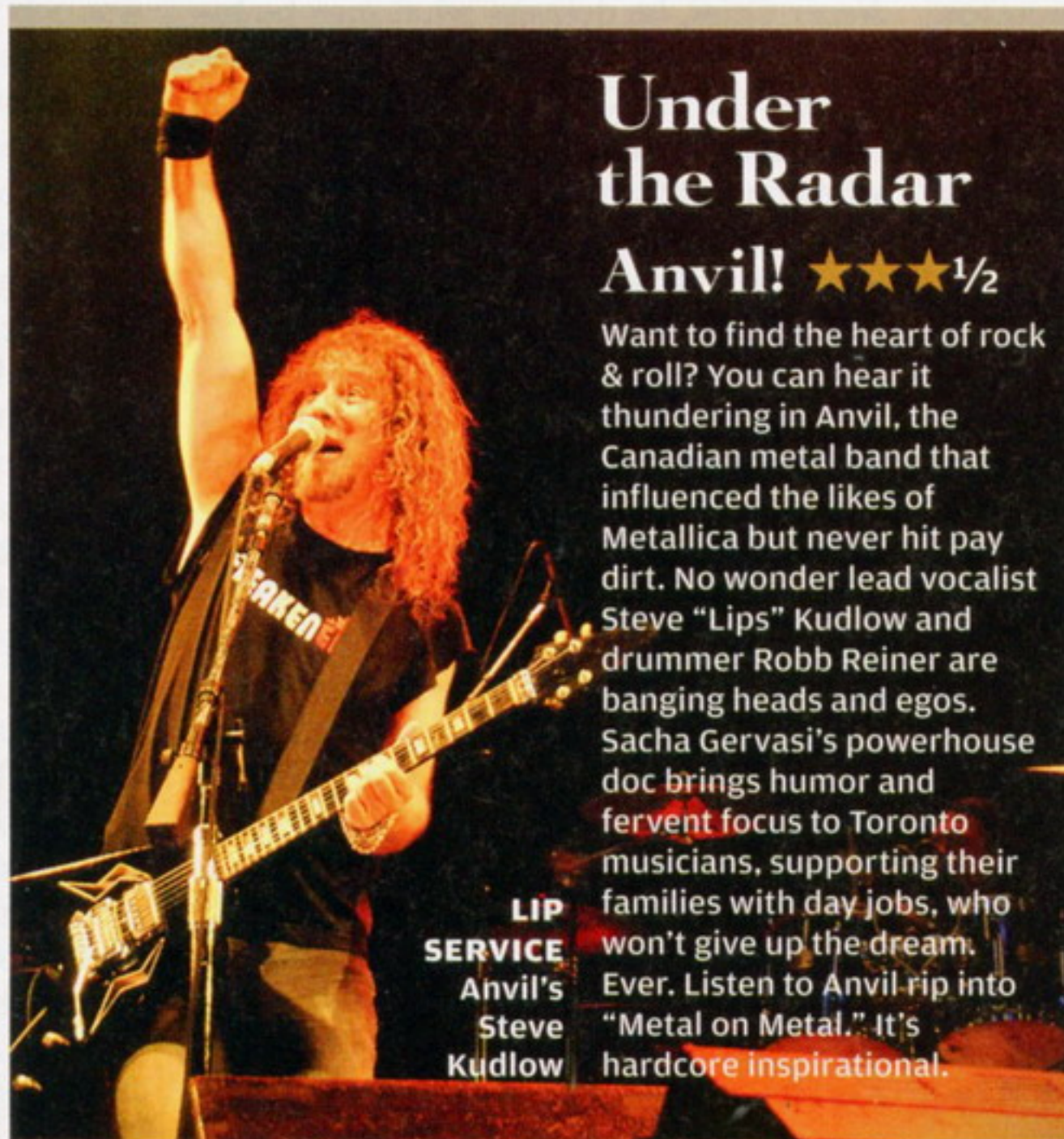
Directed by Jody Hill

"LISTEN, YOU FUCKERS, YOU screwheads. Here is a man who would not take it anymore. A man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit." Those are the thoughts that flicker through the head of Robert De Niro as Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*. And that's pretty much what Seth Rogen is thinking as mall security chief Ronnie Barnhardt in *Observe and Report*, which is – I should point out – a comedy. Funny as hell, that's how demonic it is. Imagine Scorsese directing *Police Academy*. Fans of *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* who think Rogen and writer-director Jody Hill are dish-

sap are in for an ass-kicking. If you've seen Hill's work on *The Foot Fist Way* and HBO's *Eastbound & Down*, you know this is one twisted dude.

Props to Hill and Rogen for believing you can play anything for a hoot, including R-rated sex and violence. Right away you know Rogen isn't going for lovable. Hair cropped scary-short, Ronnie prowls gut-first through the Forest Ridge Mall looking for scum. Shoplifters and skateboarders piss Ronnie off, but his focus is on a flasher who thinks he can freely dangle his dick, especially at Brandi (a sidesplittingly slutty Anna Faris), the blondie at the makeup counter on whom Ronnie has focused his freaky lust. Ronnie mistakenly relies on his right-hand man, Dennis, played by Michael Peña, who is miles away from the drama of *Crash*, *Babel* and *World Trade Center* and having a ball.

All the actors ace it, but the movie pivots on Ronnie's battle with Detective Harrison (Ray Liotta), the cop Ronnie wants to be. Liotta is *Goodfellas* tough, making no allowances for giggles. His mistake is to mock Ronnie, throwing him to a gang of vicious crackheads. It's this scene – in which Ronnie wields his flashlight like a police baton, beating his enemies bloody – that shows us just how bug-fuck dangerous and delusional Ronnie is. Hill is fearless at pushing hot buttons: date rape, shooting up and worse. Just know this: Rogen is nutso hilarious, nailing every note of mirth and malice. Even when Hill goes way too far, and he does, *Observe and Report* revels in creeping you out and making you laugh – hard.



Under the Radar

Anvil! ★★★½

Want to find the heart of rock & roll? You can hear it thundering in *Anvil*, the Canadian metal band that influenced the likes of Metallica but never hit pay dirt. No wonder lead vocalist Steve "Lips" Kudlow and drummer Robb Reiner are banging heads and egos. Sacha Gervasi's powerhouse doc brings humor and fervent focus to Toronto musicians, supporting their families with day jobs, who won't give up the dream. Ever. Listen to Anvil rip into "Metal on Metal." It's hardcore inspirational.

LIP SERVICE
Anvil's Steve Kudlow

KRISTOFFERSON

[Cont. from 61] She said, "I was just asking you to go on a run – I wasn't talking about changing your life."

But that's what she ended up doing. "I had a lot of bad habits," Kris said, "but Lisa had a great right cross."

In the Eighties, when times were the hardest for Kris, he just marched on, writing and singing beautiful songs about Sandinistas, Jesse Jackson, Vietnam vets, César Chávez and migrant workers, the evil of money, the futility of war, children, marriage and spiritual longing. As accomplished as these songs were, folks still liked the tunes about "gettin' by high" a bit better and few paid attention.

"I was so taken with what I was doing politically and trying to bring people's attention to what our country was doing down in Central America, trying to use what I'd learned, that I didn't know how far from the mainstream I'd fallen," Kris recalls. "I was driving up through Texas one time and heard the guy on the radio refer to me as 'washed up.' I'd had no idea. I was in a blessedly stupid state of shortsightedness, not allowing doubt to paralyze me."

Staring at the tabloids, people wonder why celebrities spin off into eccentricity and madness. (As someone who encountered fame at the age of 18, I've given this phenomenon considerable reflection.) It has to do with isolation – if you put a human being into any isolation chamber, they will hallucinate. Celebrity is a form of isolation. You are cut off from your community, people react and respond to you in an altered fashion. They give you exemptions from the normal rules of social engagement, they indulge you – and then they resent you for it. You live behind a glass wall – the more people stare, the more alone you feel. Then a snake of madness and megalomania creeps into even the most stable mind. The more fame, the more poison you swallow. The cure, the healing elixir – in my experience – is friendship. Kristofferson, luckily, took the time, put in the hours, made the effort to earn a shitload of friends.

Even when people were protesting his appearances and Kris would be met with a chorus of boos when he performed, Willie Nelson continued to invite Kris to join him onstage. Eventually, Willie was the one who brought Kris back into movies with *Songwriter*, for which Kris' score was nominated for an Academy Award in 1984. Then Willie, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash and Kris started a band called the Highwaymen. The group earned a Grammy nomination in 1990.

"Audiences adored them," says Lisa Kristofferson, "but they couldn't know how great those men really were together behind the scenes. It was a decade of rolling laughter and love. John and Kris' last words to each other were 'I love you.' Same to Waylon. That's rare for men, and it was real."

"Me and Kris?" Willie Nelson writes me from the road. "I think we are about as close as friends can be. I think we understand all we need to understand about each other."

* * *

*Love is the last thing to go
Love is the reason
we happened at all
And it paid for
all the damage we done
And it bought us
the freedom to fall into grace
On our way to our place in the sun.
—"The Last Thing to Go"*

IN THE MID-NINETIES, KRIS THE movie star re-emerged as a powerful character actor, working with some of the finest contemporary directors: John Sayles, James Ivory, Tim Burton, Guillermo del Toro, Richard Linklater.

A *60 Minutes* interview in the wake of his "return to form" performance in *Lone Star* in 1996 shows Kris standing in his front yard in Hawaii, relaxed and cavalier about all the renewed attention. Kris describes his modest home as "an old samurai poet warrior's house." He takes a long, thoughtful pause. "I'm his groundskeeper," he adds. He pauses again, considering the idea more deeply. "And I get to sleep with his wife!" Then he characteristically explodes with laughter.

Most movie fans today know Kris as the grizzled vampire killer in the *Blade* films. As an actor who has done some numbnut B-movie work myself, I can say that Kris' performances in the first two *Blade* films are pitch-perfect. He's the grounding wire running through those two popcorn movies.

In James Ivory's *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*, he delivers what may be his finest work ever as an actor. Lisa Kristofferson tells me Kris had internalized that character so deeply that she was afraid when he went to the set for the final death scene that he might actually let his spirit leave his body and die. Scorsese notes that "his performance in that film is like that of an older Jimmy Stewart or Gary Cooper. There is truth when he speaks. You sense that he is genuine. He has that big, iconic American face – with the soul of a poet."

When I directed Kris in 1999, he played a recovering alcoholic named Bud. A pivotal scene has him pick up the bottle again and then call an old lover. On the page it was a seven-minute-long monologue. I had picked a location so that I could play the whole speech in one long shot. I had a Godard-inspired idea where Kris would walk from room to room, talking and drinking, switching lights on and off, and then at the end of the speech he would arrive back in the same place the shot had begun. It was a complex maneuver, and I was excited about it. I explained the idea to Kris.

"Have you ever had a serious problem with alcohol?" he asked in his gravelly voice.

"Ahhh, no."

"Uh-huh," he said. "Does Bud have a serious problem?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, let me tell you something. I've had a serious problem with alcohol. And if I was gonna fall off the wagon and crack open a bottle of Jack, I sure as shit am not gonna walk around my room like Chatty Cathy, flippin' on and off lights."

"What would you do?" I asked.

"Well, if I was gonna fall, I'd fall hard and sit my ass down, snap that seal and drink the whole goddamn bottle."

"Hmmm," I paused, considering the effect of abandoning my fantastic shot.

"Let me put it another way," Kris added. "This speech is extremely long, and we are gonna be lucky today if I remember it at all. But if I gotta pour whiskey, and walk, and flip switches, and not bump into a moving camera, and remember all these goddamn lines, we're dead in the water."

I laughed and set the camera up straight on him – simple as can be – and he delivered. His performance is electric.

* * *

*Why me, Lord?
What have I ever done
to deserve even one
of the blessings I've known?
Tell me, Lord, what did I ever do
that was worth loving you
Or the kindness you've shown?
—"Why Me"*

"WHY DO YOU THINK YOU DIDN'T SELF-destruct like so many others?" I ask Kris. He was just sitting still, answering my questions slowly and deliberately. Always a touch short of breath, he seems like a man who's survived a shotgun blast to the chest – or more likely smoked 40 trillion cigarettes.

"I guess I don't really understand how it happened that I have lived this long. Probably doesn't have anything to do with me, except that my desire for life is strong enough to force me to find some kind of discipline. Some people get bowled over by failure, and can't pick themselves back up again, you know?" He looked at me, his crystal-blue eyes more piercing than ever, now that his lids hang and shadow them.

"Even with an experience like *Heaven's Gate*, as negative as that was, I mean, the way it was received," he continues. "There was still so much good about it for me. Cimino is gifted and passionate, and the film woke me up to an ugly piece of American history – when the cattlemen's association started wiping out civilians with the backing of the U.S. government. It was money they were killing people for. I became aware of this about the same time that the U.S. was going down and killing

people in Nicaragua – I learned about all that on that movie – so there were a lot of positive things that came out of that experience as far as my education.” He pauses. “I was lucky,” he says in a warm voice, “that the old creed of imagination that had got me there in the first place didn’t get killed in the process. Through it all I could still find reasons to write and go out and sing. I became unmarketable in music and film at the same time – but I was still experiencing enough *joy* just from the creative act.”

When he said that, I realized why I had wanted to make a documentary about Kris. When I first met him, I wondered what it felt like to have stood center stage in the heat of the spotlight and then to have watched the beam move on.

“I know there are people out there that say that the fact that I got to be a movie star hurt my writing. Tom T. [Hall] once said, ‘One of my favorite songwriters died of overexposure.’ And he meant me.” Kris raises his eyebrows. “I don’t believe it. I think I was writing to the best of my abilities all the time, every album was how I felt about what was going on in my life and the world at that given time. I never felt success had made me worse. I never felt failure helped anybody. I don’t think if you’re a serious artist you’re going to be more or less lazy depending on your level of success.”

We carried on for a while discussing Bob Dylan and Emily Dickinson; one who has maintained meteoric fame throughout his life and one whose life passed in obscurity – but both fully realized artists. “If you’re serious about what you’re doing, all that other shit just fades to the background.” He takes a deep, long, difficult breath. “But I do wish I could take all the good moments of my life and spread ‘em out like one every other year. It seems to me that ‘good times,’ like the ‘hard times,’ come in bunches.”

“Did you ever make up with your parents?” I ask.

“Before he died, my father told me that ‘I’ll never understand what you have been doing with your life, but I do understand your *need* to do it.’ You see, he had really wanted to be a pilot, and he understood my drive – nothing would have ever stopped him from flying.”

“What about your mother?”

“We were good.” He pauses and grins, remembering a story. “She and Johnny Cash came to this tribute thing they were doing for me over at Pomona College, and you should’ve seen my mom hugging and fawning over him. It was great.” It seems in the presence of the Man in Black, his mother had forgotten all about her earlier admonishment that “nobody over the age of 14 listens to that kind of music.”

“I’ll tell you a story,” Kris says. “After June passed, they were having a service where you view the corpse, all the people,

friends and guests were there. John was sitting over in a chair right by the coffin, so I went over and sat next to him, and people were coming by, shaking his hand and paying their respects to June. This one guy came over and when he saw me, he said, ‘Oh, Kris Kristofferson! You are one of the best singers I’ve ever heard!’ He went on and on and shook my hand and left. As he walked away, John says, and you got to realize where John is at this moment in time, John leans over and whispers, ‘Well, that’s *one*.’ Kris laughs at the memory. “In the depths of his despair, he could still take the piss outta me!”

“I’ve thought a lot about Kris,” Rosanne Cash says. “His humility is a powerful quality, but to me, it just supports what I think is his greatest attribute: his truth-telling. He is an oracle. Kris tells the truth, all the time, about everything . . . except himself, which is where the humility part gets muddy. He can be *too* self-deprecating and dismissive of his own greatness. If you can get past the tangle of that, then you see the truth at the center, and *there* is where the power is for me. The narrative of his life has been one of ever-increasing integrity. I observed his friendship with my dad, and although Kris would not say this, I think Dad learned from Kris. Not that my dad didn’t have a refined integrity – he did – but he had more problems living it out in day-to-day reality than Kris does.”

“Love to me is the only answer to what’s going on with the world,” Kris said. “The kind that you feel unconditionally for your children.” (Kristofferson now has eight kids from his three marriages.) “And if you work at it, you can get to where it includes others too. . . . If you were to attain the highest state, I guess you would love everybody.”

Talking to Kris today, you get the feeling that what he really wants for Christmas is for the Holy Muse to see fit to share with him one more song that could change the world. While he waits, he wants to write his memoirs, but he seems to fear that would be admitting he’s old. His expectation of himself is tremendous, and I would guess that Kris dances regularly with the “Black Dog” of depression.

“We always thought he’d do something big,” recalled a classmate from college. “He was president of the freshman class, the sophomore class. He was president of *every* class; of the debating team, the writing club, the football team, baseball. Kris was the best-liked, most respected boy that school ever saw. But there was always something *else* about him, nice as he was. There was a sadness.”

The record producer Don Was once said that Kristofferson was the most intelligent person he’d ever met: “That kind of enhanced consciousness can be a psychic burden to the poor soul who has got to live with it 24 hours a day. But it sure makes for some great music.”

* * *

WHEN KRIS GETS UP TO LEAVE MY PLACE, I ask him if he has ever done a play.

“Nope,” he answers.

“Would you want to?” I had a specific production in mind.

“Definitely,” says the 72-year-old man.

I watch Kris dash out of my apartment and hustle down the street through the rain, having refused an umbrella, his ratty old cowboy boots splashing through puddles. I thought of a Eugene O’Neill line: “People who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle-classes.”

Kris’ wife, Lisa, had been with him when he arrived for our interview. On her way out she had referred to him as her velveteen rabbit.

“I ain’t a goddamn rabbit!” Kris had bristled as any man would at getting called a goofy pet name in public. Smiling at the memory of that exchange, I went to my son’s room and found the old Margery Williams book *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

“What is *Real*?” asked the rabbit one day. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. . . . It doesn’t happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. Generally by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

Reading those lines, after spending time with the man, I find Lisa’s nickname well-suited. Her husband has a full head of hair and is still dastardly handsome, but he’s worn down along the edges and yet somehow more *alive* than ever. Passed around and overhanded by the public, Kris has been called many things: hick, intellectual, playboy, husband, radical, soldier, hippie, class president, outlaw, loser, star, washed up, legend. The Texas boy whom everybody had a plan for, the Army captain who grew his hair long, moved to Nashville wanting to be Hank Williams, walked into a recording studio wanting to be Johnny Cash, and went to Hollywood wanting to be Glenn Ford. He has now been loved so hard, worked so long and burned every dream to smoking ashes, so much so that he’s not wanting at all. He just *is*. Authentic. Genuine. Real.

I got lucky

I got everything I wanted

I got happy

There wasn’t nothing else to do

And I’d be crazy

Not to wonder if I’m worthy

of the part I play

In this dream that’s coming true.

–“Pilgrim’s Progress”

75

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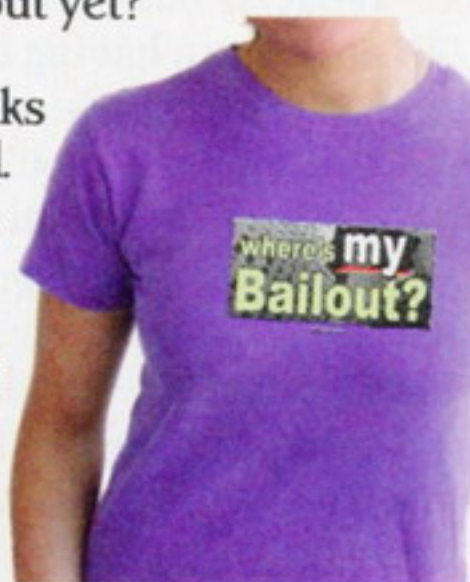
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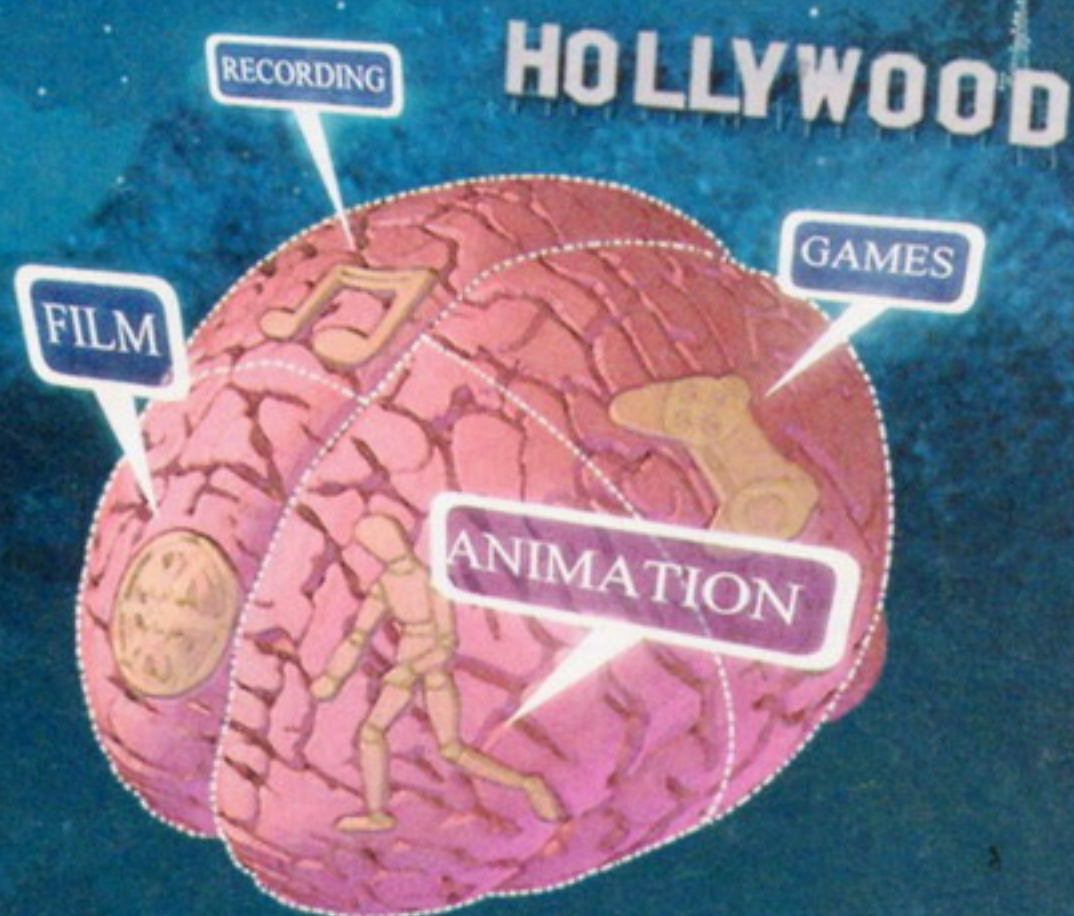
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CHARTS

BILLBOARD HOT 100 TOP 10

- Flo Rida**
"Right Round" - Poe Boy
- T.I.**
"Dead and Gone" - Grand Hustle/Atlantic
- Lady Gaga**
"Poker Face" - Streamline/KonLive/Cherrytree/Interscope
- Soulja Boy Tell 'Em**
"Kiss Me Thru the Phone" - Collipark
- Kelly Clarkson**
"My Life Would Suck Without You" - S/19/RCA
- The All-American Rejects**
"Gives You Hell" - Doghouse/DGC/Interscope
- Kanye West**
"Heartless" - Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam
- Jamie Foxx**
"Blame It" - J
- Miley Cyrus**
"The Climb" - Walt Disney
- Lady Gaga**
"Just Dance" - Streamline/KonLive/Cherrytree/Interscope



COLLEGE RADIO TOP 10 ALBUMS

- Neko Case**
Middle Cyclone - Anti-
- M. Ward**
Hold Time - Merge
- Animal Collective**
Merriweather Post Pavilion - Domino
- Dan Auerbach**
Keep It Hid - Nonesuch
- Handsome Furs**
Face Control - Sub Pop
- Black Lips**
200 Million Thousand - Vice
- Mirah**
(A)spera - K
- Morrissey**
Years of Refusal - Lost Highway
- Bonnie "Prince" Billy**
Beware - Drag City



10 N.A.S.A.
The Spirit of Apollo - Anti-

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Top 40 Albums

- 1 Kelly Clarkson**
All I Ever Wanted - S/19/RCA
- 3 U2**
No Line on the Horizon - Island/Interscope
- 14 ↑ Twilight**
Soundtrack - Summit/Chop Shop/Atlantic
- 2 The-Dream**
Love vs. Money - Radio Killa/Def Jam
- 6 Lady Gaga**
The Fame - Streamline/KonLive/Cherrytree/Interscope
- 5 Taylor Swift**
Fearless - Big Machine
- 7 Nickelback**
Dark Horse - Roadrunner
- 8 NEW Gorilla Zoe**
Don't Feed Da Animals - Block/Bad Boy South/Bad Boy
- 9 Beyoncé**
I Am... Sasha Fierce - Music World/Columbia
- 10 Jamie Foxx**
Intuition - J
- 11 NEW Twiztid**
W.I.C.K.E.D. - Psychopathic
- 12 T.I.**
Paper Trail - Grand Hustle/Atlantic
- 13 The Fray**
The Fray - Epic
- 14 NEW The Decemberists**
The Hazards of Love - Capitol
- 15 Carrie Underwood**
Carnival Ride - 19/Arista Nashville
- 16 NEW Static-X**
Cult of Static - Reprise
- 17 Kings of Leon**
Only by the Night - RCA
- 18 Kanye West**
808s & Heartbreak - Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam
- 19 Jason Mraz**
We Sing. We Dance. We Steal Things. - Atlantic
- 20 J. Holiday**
Round 2 - Music Line
- 21 NEW Randy Travis**
I Told You So: The Ultimate Hits of Randy Travis - Warner Bros. (Nashville)
- 22 Britney Spears**
Circus - Jive
- 23 Pink**
Funhouse - LaFace
- 24 Zac Brown Band**
The Foundation - Roar/Big Picture/Home Grown/Atlantic
- 25 NOW 29**
Various Artists - Universal/EMI/Sony Music/JLG
- 26 Keyshia Cole**
A Different Me - Imani/Geffen
- 27 Darius Rucker**
Learn to Live - Capitol Nashville
- 28 Neko Case**
Middle Cyclone - Anti-
- 29 Taylor Swift**
Taylor Swift - Big Machine
- 30 Ne-Yo**
Year of the Gentleman - Def Jam
- 31 India.Arie**
Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics - Soulbird/Universal Republic
- 32 Slumdog Millionaire**
Soundtrack - Interscope
- 33 Katy Perry**
One of the Boys - Capitol
- 34 Coldplay**
Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends - Capitol
- 35 Akon**
Freedom - Konvict/Upfront/SRC/Universal Motown
- 36 Bruce Springsteen**
Working on a Dream - Columbia
- 37 Kid Rock**
Rock N Roll Jesus - Top Dog/Atlantic
- 38 Lil Wayne**
Tha Carter III - Cash Money/Universal Motown
- 39 Theory of a Deadman**
Scars & Souvenirs - 604
- 40 2ND Hollywood Undead**
Swan Songs - A&M/Octone



Kelly Back on Top
Driven by the hit single "My Life Would Suck Without You," Clarkson's fourth album has sold a strong 345,624 copies in its first two weeks.



Gorilla in Our Midst
Atlanta MC Gorilla Zoe - who replaced Young Jeezy in the Diddy-produced crew Boyz n Da Hood - sold 31,257 copies of his second LP in its first week.



December Reign
Despite being available on iTunes only, the Decemberists' Sixties-folk-inspired rock opera scored a career best by selling 19,312 copies.



Static-X Clings
The industrial-metal group covers Poison and Whitesnake on the bonus cuts of its sixth disc, which debuted with 19,045 copies sold.

00 Chart position on March 25th, 2009
00 Chart position on March 18th, 2009
NEW New Entry **↑** Greatest Gainer
2ND Re-Entry
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From the Vault

RS 679, April 7th, 1994

TOP 10 SINGLES

- R. Kelly**
"Bump N' Grind" - Jive
- Ace of Base**
"The Sign" - Arista
- Mariah Carey**
"Without You/Never Forget You" - Columbia
- Celine Dion**
"The Power of Love" - 550 Music
- All-4-One**
"So Much in Love" - Blitz/Atlantic
- Salt-N-Pepa With En Vogue**
"Whatta Man" - Next Plateau
- Crash Test Dummies**
"Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm" - Arista
- Richard Marx**
"Now and Forever" - Capitol
- Prince**
"The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" - NPG/Bellmark
- Bruce Springsteen**
"Streets of Philadelphia" - Columbia



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